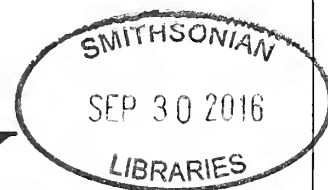


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Compiled and distributed by Michael C Jennings (ABBA Co-ordinator)

for contributors to the Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia

1992, ANOTHER GOOD YEAR FOR NEW BREEDING BIRDS IN ARABIA

One of the fascinations of birding in Arabia is that there is never a dull day. Migrants can be seen every day of the year and, as we all know, 'anything can turn up'. It is probably not an exaggeration to say that every species that regularly migrates in Eurasia will eventually turn up in Arabia. Seemingly impossible breeding birds are now regularly discovered. Arabia is at the extreme range of many species and the wholesale creation of new habitats, through the large scale irrigation projects, and various artificial wetlands, in the last decades, has encouraged a surprising number of unlikely species to breed. On the other hand several indigenous but rarely breeding species are increasing, yet others that have evaded 'proof of breeding' until now, are being recorded breeding for the first time. Add to this an injection of exotic species and it is no wonder that again this year seven birds have been added to the breeding birds list. Since the ABBA scheme started over 30 new breeding birds have been discovered for Arabia, that's an incredible 15% of the total known in 1984! The new breeding species can be split more or less equally in to three categories; those breeding quite outside their previous range because of the creation of entirely new habitat in Arabia, those on the very edge of their range that would only breed in Arabia in small numbers when conditions are just right and exotic/introduced species. What 'impossible' new breeding birds await discovery in 1993.

I was able to make two visits to Arabia during 1992; ABBA Survey 11 to the UAE and Oman and Survey 12 to northern Saudi Arabia. The trip to the UAE and Oman in February and March was with Colin Richardson. It was a rather whistle-stop tour of Oman down to Dhofar and to places in the UAE which I have not seen for 20 years. How things have changed! My trip to northern Saudi Arabia in April and May with Mohammed al Salama of the NCWCD, Riyadh, was to the border area with Jordan and Iraq and the edge of the Great Nafud. Although I

have been to northern Saudi Arabia on two previous surveys the area is so vast that I hardly crossed my previous tracks. Summary reports, including the ornithological highlights, of each trip are available on request.

The NCWCD report on ABBA Surveys 9 and 10 to central Arabia became available in Autumn 1992. The report contains distribution maps of the 51 breeding species noted during the surveys and probably represents the most thorough information source on bird distribution in central Arabia to date. A few copies of the report (68 pages) are available for sale.

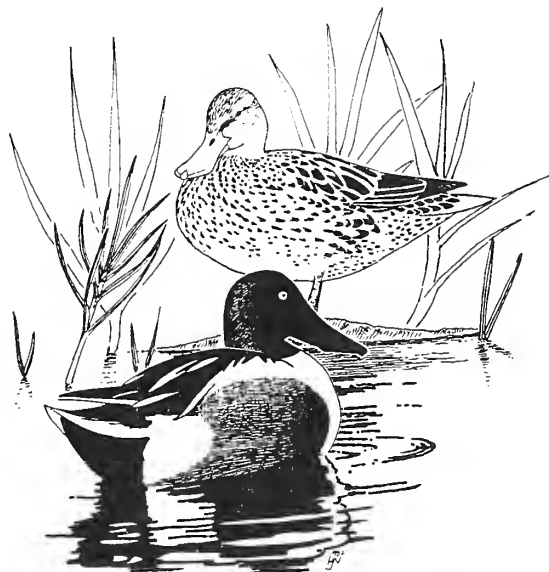


Fig 1. The shoveler *Anas clypeata* bred in Eastern Saudi Arabia in 1988, 1989 and 1990.

Since last year the project has lost Julie Newman for family reasons. Data capture of observer records has been taken over by Penny Harbard. The literature research has been done since early 1992 by Anne Jones. Once the observer records have been captured to the database both Penny and Anne will concentrate on

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الإشراف والنشر بواسطة
الهيئة الوطنية لحماية الحياة الفطرية
وإنسانها.
ص ب ٦١٦٨١، الرياض.
المملكة العربية السعودية

extracting records from literature sources. This is a very important task as the literature is an essential historical source of species range and status. To date no literature records have been added to the database and this will not be done until the software has been re-structured and enhanced. As the project proceeds it is inevitable that a number of small inadequacies of the specially written software will come to light. These are now being straightened out and the system improved, giving a tremendous power to sort, search and arrange information both as text and maps.

All this progress has not been without cost. The biggest problem has been the failure to get the *Interim Atlas* completed. I am afraid it is still several months away. It cannot now be prepared until all the observers records for 1992 have been added to the database.

This issue is the biggest *Phoenix* yet. It is particularly pleasing that so much material has come thudding through my letter box before copy date (rather than the day after as has usually been the case). Apart from articles on new breeding birds, and some rarer ones, it is important that observers should continue to monitor escapes and exotic species and therefore the summaries of avian exotica in Bahrain and UAE by Erik Hirschfeld and Colin Richardson, respectively, are particularly welcomed.

Finally I hope that all observers both past and present will take a special note of the article on the ICBP/OSME initiative to produce a catalogue of important bird areas in the Middle East. This project is extremely important. The final report will be a basic source document for a generation to come by all those interested in birds, the environment and conservation in the Middle East area. It will be of great use to Governments and as well as non-Government organisations and indeed to individuals. If observers have detailed information of areas they regard as important for birds then they are urged to contact Mike Evans the project organiser, with a view to making a contribution to this important task.



NEW BREEDING SPECIES

The list of Arabian birds continues to grow and the previously accepted status and distribution of birds is continually confounded. Since the issue of *Phoenix* 8, seven new breeding/potentially breeding birds have been found. The aim of the following note is to provide details and discussion of recent breeding species that are additional to the *List of the Breeding Birds of Arabia* prepared by ABBA in 1987, and provided to all contributors. The species reference numbers for the seven new breeding birds are as follows; shoveler *Anas clypeata*, 194; white-tailed plover *Chettusia leucura*, 492; Alexandrine parakeet *Psittacula eupatria*, 2024; Eurasian cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*, 724,

mountain nightjar *Caprimulgus poliocephalus*, 2018; Baya weaver *Ploceus philippinus*, 2019 and streaked weaver *Ploceus manyar*, 2028.

FIRST BREEDING RECORD OF SHOVELER IN ARABIA

In early 1985, a sewage lagoon was laid out in a low lying area of open desert as part of the construction of a major airport near Qatif (PB30), Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia. Beyond the retaining embankment of the lagoon there was an upwelling of ground water, with sprouting fringe vegetation, which began to attract birds in late 1985.

In 1986 the lagoon continued to fill up and the surrounding ground water areas stabilised with considerable reed growth. With the onset of the 1986/1987 winter, duck numbers increased and shoveler *Anas clypeata* were noted there for the first time in December. By the following winter, 1987/1988, the lagoon had reached its full capacity and an overflow pipe was installed to allow the effluent to flow into the surrounding desert, greatly increasing the area of water. Duck numbers reached a peak of 400 on 5 December 1987 and by the end of the winter, nine duck species had been recorded at the site.

Shoveler were first noted as "paired off" on 20 January 1988 and there were five distinct pairs there on 1 and 13 February. They were seen at the site also in March, April and May.

With hindsight it is clear that a particular pair had taken a specific territory on a long rectangular stretch of shallow ground water, running parallel with the southern perimeter of the lagoon. This piece of water was the first to show in 1985/1986 and as a result it had acquired a vigorous growth of reeds on three sides, with the fourth side being the man made embankment retaining the sewage lagoon. This embankment allowed car access and excellent viewing into this stretch of water.

From April I noticed a behaviour change in a drake. Usually the species was shy and always the first to fly, but on 16 April one was noted swimming in and out of the reed fringe, appearing tame and unconcerned by the presence of the car. This behaviour was recorded on several subsequent visits. Also the male had taken to standing "on guard" on a rock forming part of the embankment, allowing close approach, before slipping into the water and swimming leisurely to the reeds. Similar behaviour was recorded almost every day from 23-31 May at the same time of day (approximately 11.15 hrs).

On 1 June 1988 the male was not seen in its usual place but as I was watching other waterfowl just beyond the northeast corner of the lagoon my attention was suddenly drawn to a flotilla of about nine very small ducklings, with a female shoveler bringing up the rear. They passed right

across my field of view and out of sight behind a reed bed outcrop, into deeper cover.

I believe this was probably their first excursion after hatching, the female bringing them away from the more dangerous and accessible nesting area to better cover and deeper water. Subsequently I saw the drake on 14 different days up to 21 June behaving in exactly the same manner which led me to wonder if a second pair might be breeding. On 22 and 23 June I found him on the larger stretch of water which the brood had entered on 1 June.

On 27 June I saw the female again breaking cover, this time with at least three ducklings, which were now considerably larger.

On 30 June, whilst walking round the extended water northeast of the lagoon the drake swam out from the fringe to the centre of the lagoon and appeared to put on a distraction display. It rose to about one metre in the air and flopped back onto the surface as though injured. It repeated this act several times before swimming back into the reeds. I believe this was a distraction display since it could easily have remained hidden in the reeds, which I am sure it would have done if it was in moult. There was no sign of the female or of the brood on these occasions.

On 4 July, five weeks after my first view of the ducklings, I put up a flight of eight shoveler, the female and seven fledged birds. They performed a loose, low, circular flight and went down again quite quickly into cover. There was no sign of the drake. Finally I saw the group, now totalling 7, (female and six young birds) swimming together on 15 September, just before the influx of winter visitors started in October.

Shoveler bred again at the site in both 1989 and 1990 and although the ability to view into the flooded areas was impeded by the growth of fringe vegetation, I was able to record the following.

In late January and early February 1989, display and aggression between males in the presence of a female was observed at the same 1988 site and a single male was noted in March and April with the same "on guard" behaviour as in 1988. No further activity was recorded at this location but on 18 and 25 May at the site of the 1988 drake distraction display, a pair were seen briefly together before retreating in the reed fringe and on 8 June a male was seen repeating the 'on guard' behaviour.

On 9 August I put up a female with three fledged young which performed eight low circuits before going down into cover.

Much disturbance took place at the site in the winter of 1989/90, including mechanical reed clearance from the lagoon, reed burning and use of herbicides. There was also disturbance by shooting (cartidge cases found around the margins and actually witnessed on 21 December 1989), and trapping (snare were found frequently in the reed

margins on crake runs). As a result the birds were dispersed and jumpy. Shoveler sightings were much reduced but pairs were noted in February, March and April 1990, and on 25 April at a different stretch of water further northeast of the lagoon a single drake was seen performing the "on guard" routine. It was seen at exactly the same spot on 10 May and after a protracted watch, four half grown ducklings were seen moving in and out of the reed fringe behind. They kept close to and inside the reeds and there may have been others present. The female was not seen on this occasion.

I left the project in July 1990 and have had no further update on the status of the shoveler there.

Eamon Sarson, 10 Knoll Road, Abergavenny, Gwent, NP7 7AN, UK.

N.B. The nearest place to Arabia where the shoveler breeds is Turkey. (Ed).

WHITE-TAILED PLOVERS BREED IN THE EASTERN PROVINCE OF SAUDI ARABIA IN 1992

My local patch in Saudi Arabia is a small area of freshwater marsh about 4 km north of al Khobar. It is separated from the coast by a six lane highway and the water level is unaffected by the tide. By late summer only a small area of open water remains. Disturbance levels are high as it is used as a rubbish tip and part of the black-winged stilts *Himantopus himantopus* colony was bulldozed in the spring. The vegetation is dominated by grasses and tall reeds with low bushes and trees in the drier areas. Insect life is abundant and fish, frogs and various reptiles are common.

What was thought to be a migrating white-tailed plover *Chettusia leucura* was seen on 16 March 1992 and on 19 March two were present. On 24 March the two plovers were observed mobbing a steppe eagle *Aquila nipalensis*. These two birds were present every time I visited the marsh until I went on holiday on 9 April.

I next visited the site on 30 April with Rob Howe. The plovers were now very excitable and joined in with the stilts and vigorously mobbed Rob and I. It was interesting to see how the tactics of the species differed. The plovers had a psychological approach, keeping station 3 m above our heads calling out an insistent trisyllabic "I see you", with the emphasis on the second syllable. The stilts were more violent, angrily swooping and dive-bombing. Rob and I quickly learned to recognise the accelerating alarm call which would signal a new stilt attack.

On 4 June, due to the falling water level, I was able to observe the plovers from a different vantage point and it was then I discovered that there were four birds, two pairs in all. On subsequent visits it became obvious that each pair frequented the same place. One pair standing beside a small bush on a sand bank 5 m from a reedbed, the other

pair using a large rock the same distance from the reeds. The birds often stood, or walked, with their head tucked into their shoulders, stretching their neck up when they sensed danger. Sometimes one would take off and swoop on its partner showing off its black and white wing pattern and calling out like a lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*. I also heard high pitched piping noises that I thought may have been anxiety calls.

On 13 June an almost full grown juvenile was seen with the pair near the rock. It was paler underneath and had a dark cap and mottled upperparts. It crept almost mouselike from cover to cover and when still was very hard to see. On 18 June two young were seen with the pair near the bush and on 26 June two free flying young were with the pair near the rock and one youngster was with the other pair.

Although only three young plovers were seen at any one time I believe that each pair raised two young, to at least the free flying stage. Throughout this period the birds were very wary and the slightest disturbance would see the youngsters dash into the tall reeds, while their parents remained behind with their necks craned on the lookout.

Due to work commitments and holidays the site was not visited again until 20 September when two adults were present. The last sighting was of two adults on 16 October.

Graham Ramsay, ADVOM, British Aerospace, PO Box 98, Dhahran 31932, Saudi Arabia

ALEXANDRINE PARAKEET, ARABIA'S NEWEST BREEDING PARROT?

The Alexandrine parakeet *Psittacula eupatria* is a native to the Indian region. It closely resembles the rose-ringed parakeet *Psittacula krameri* which is now a widespread, alien, breeding species in Arabia. Like the rose-ringed it is often imported into Arabia for the pet trade but it now occurs feral in Dubai and Abu Dhabi in the UAE and Bahrain and is likely to breed in these localities. In view of the similarity with the rose-ringed parakeet it could easily be overlooked and it should be looked for at other localities.

EURASIAN CUCKOO HEARD CALLING IN NORTHERN UAE AND MUSANDAM OMAN

Early on the morning of 1 March 1992 in the Wadi Bih (WA28) northern UAE, Rob Morris and I both heard a Eurasian cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* call once. Although we commented on the call at the time neither of us thought much about it and indeed after a short while I wondered if I had been imagining things! The locality was at about 330 m altitude in a ravine scattered with acacia and palm trees with, here and there, small garden areas. We made our way up the wadi by vehicle and over the Oman border into Musandam, where we followed the track up

to about 1000 m, stopping for some time at 25°46.93'N 56°12.40'E. At that point a cuckoo began to call at 8.30 am and called continuously until 9.40 am. The call was the same as the species makes in Europe but individual calls were delivered rather quicker than I had experienced previously. The calling bird was never seen but it moved around in a circular movement along the wadis and ravines surrounding the hilltop we were on. The hilltop was dry and rocky with only scattered low shrubs and grass tufts. The valleys held a few small deciduous trees and bushes. The fact that the bird called so determinedly and within a relatively narrow area, is a good indication that it breeds in this region. The cuckoo is quite a widespread breeding bird in the mountains of southern Iran (Scott, 1975; *The Birds of Iran*) probably only 2-300 kms from northern UAE.

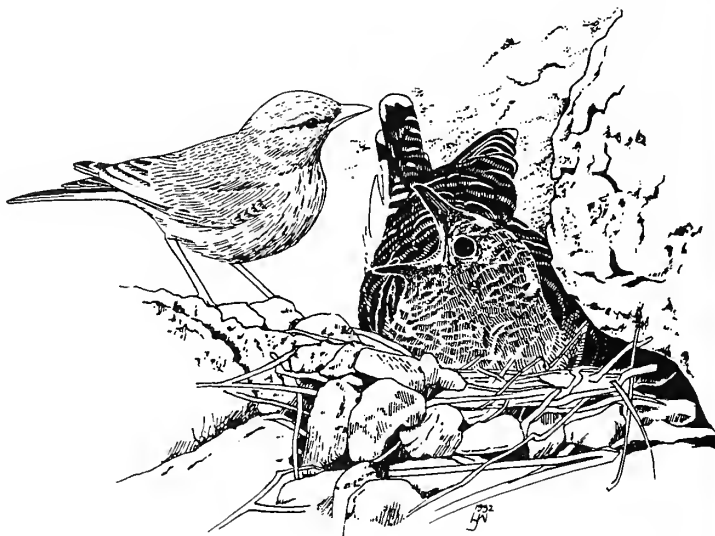


Fig 2. The Eurasian cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* was an unexpected addition to the list of Arabian breeding birds in 1992. The desert lark *Ammomanes deserti* is probably an important host species.

Possible host species at the spot where the cuckoo was calling were desert lark *Ammomanes deserti*, Hume's wheatear *Oenanthe alboniger*, scrub warbler *Scotocerca inquieta*, trumpeter finch *Bucanetes githagineus* and house bunting *Emberiza striolata*.

Later, in conversation with Colin Richardson, it transpired that records of cuckoos calling in the northern UAE were by no means unique. Colin has very kindly supplied the following notes on previous records and some later ones in Spring 1992, all from atlas square WA28.

- Late March 1988 in the region of Wadi Qadaa UAE. A cuckoo was calling one evening. The following day others were heard (and one was seen) during several hours spent in the wadi and nearby hills. (Peter Bentley).
- On 6 March 1992, one was calling on a high plateau at approx 25°45'N, 55°06'E UAE (Carolyn Lehmann).
- At least two calling at the same locality as the previous record on 20 March 1992 at 1730 hrs (J K Bannon and C Richardson).

Other records from the same general area have also been mentioned but have not been confirmed. Further records are needed especially to establish which species are being parasitized by this cuckoo.

M. C. Jennings.

MOUNTAIN NIGHTJAR: A NEW BREEDING BIRD FOR ARABIA

In November 1982, whilst camped in a mountain wadi in the highlands of the Asir Province (IA13) of Saudi Arabia, I heard a night-call that I did not recognise. I had with me a mini tape recorder, used for noting sightings, and with this I was able to record the call. The recording quality was poor but ultimately, as I will explain, it proved to be invaluable in identifying the bird making the call.

In the weeks that followed I searched the bird literature I had to hand to place the mystery bird but to no avail. I then sent a copy of the tape to various ornithological friends but none could put a name to it. Unfortunately, because of business pressures, I was unable to return to the wadi in question before my company transferred me to Riyadh.

The tape then lay archived for eight years until my memory of the event was stirred by reading the article on the spotted thick-knee in Arabia by Michael Gallagher and Karen Stanley Price in *Sandgrouse* Vol. 12. I wrote to Michael and sent a copy of the mystery bird tape and asked him if he thought the call might have been from one of the *Burhinidae*. Shortly after I received a letter from Prof Hilary Fry, whose opinion had been sought by Michael Gallagher, with the surprising and exciting comments:

"It is one of the *Caprimulgus pectoralis* complex, of three or four species of African nightjars, called Litany birds, because of their liquid rendering of "Good Lord Deliverrrus"! From spectrographic analysis and comparison with others in the group it was most probably *C. poliocephalus* - mountain nightjar."

In Professor Fry's view the fact that the bird was singing, almost certainly indicated that it was breeding and it was also possible that, because its song was pitched lower than the nominate African species, it might be a new sub-species. (At this point in this brief account I must also gratefully acknowledge the considerable technical achievement of Dave Waters and Dr Peter Gray of Sultan Qaboos University for getting the best spectrogram possible from a recording that was weak and of very poor quality to start with).

Since that time Peter Symens and Dr Steve Newton, both working for the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development, Riyadh, have devoted considerable time and energy to securing positive proof of the identity of the mystery bird. Recently a specimen was mist-netted by Dr Newton and was positively

confirmed to be *C. poliocephalus* by Peter Symens. A detailed note on this extremely localised new breeding species is currently being prepared and I shall therefore comment no further at this stage, other than to observe that, but for a chance recording and the ornithological and technical expertise of many people, I might still be puzzled by that haunting call I heard in the night so many years ago.

Arthur Stagg, British Aerospace, PO Box 34, Khamis Mushait, Saudi Arabia.

Note Vol 3 of the *Birds of Africa* records that in the Ethiopian highlands, this species inhabits the edges of olive, juniper and other moist forests. It forages over open ground, ploughed fields, pastures etc. Eggs are laid on bare ground in Ethiopia in May and possibly February. Ed.

BAYA AND STREAKED WEAVERS ARE NOW WIDESPREAD

Both the Baya weaver *Ploceus philippinus* and streaked weaver *P. manyar* are increasingly being recorded in Arabia and there seems little doubt that all owe their origin to released or escaped captive birds. Young of both species have been heard in nests in July 1991 near Riyadh (MB26), Saudi Arabia (D R James). Both may breed in Bahrain (See Erik Hirschfeld's note on Bahrain escaped species below). The streaked weaver has also been seen at various spots in the UAE (see Colin Richardson's UAE escapes and introductions report below). The following note on nest building and breeding activity of the streaked weaver near Qatif (PB30) eastern Saudi Arabia by Eamon Sarson and Mike Athendriou, illustrates how a lot of singing and nest building activity by weavers does not necessarily mean breeding is proven.

NEST BUILDING ACTIVITIES OF STREAKED WEAVER NEAR QATIF, EASTERN PROVINCE, SAUDI ARABIA

On the night of 28-29 April 1989 there were severe storms with very high winds, thunder, lightning and heavy rain (about 4 cm recorded) in the Eastern Province. However by 29 April midday it had become hot and still, when we made our regular visit to the sewage lagoon of the new King Fahd International Airport (PB30). It was clear from the deposit of debris that the overnight winds had been from east south east.

We became aware of an active group of unusual birds in a reedbed. Their striking yellow heads were prominent from a long distance. There were between six and eight birds in the dense reeds which also contained many warblers and house sparrows. The unidentified birds were very active and noisy. We assumed there were three or more males (which had the striking yellow crown) and a similar number of duller females. The male had a vivid

yellow crown, a very black face, cheeks, chin and nape. It had a heavily streaked back and a similar streaked breast but on a paler base and reddish legs. It was a compact bird, very much at ease on the reed stems, swaying easily with them and moving constantly. It had a strong, blackish bill. We were satisfied that they were a species of weaver.

We saw the birds again on 30 April and this time identified them as streaked weaver *Ploceus manyar* from King, et al, 1975; *The Birds of South East Asia*. Our initial field identification was later confirmed from photographs.

We saw the birds regularly in the next 22 days and, using the car as a hide, compiled the following details of their nest building activities, vocalisations and behaviour.

On 4 May we first noted nest building activities. A male was seen to settle about a foot from the top of a reed. It carefully 'nicked' the edge of the fresh green reed leaf and proceeded to tear off a very thin strip right to the top, taking flight to complete the severance in expert fashion. It then dropped out of sight into the reeds. Later as the wind moved the reeds back and forth we were able to see the male nest building at this spot. This reed leaf cutting action was repeated five times on this visit and on numerous occasions later, each time there was loud calling as the male approached the nest site and similar calling within the reeds followed by a silence as work proceeded on the nest. Males were also seen tearing off short lengths resembling string from the dead sheaths covering the lower reed stem.

One apparent aspect of nest building which we never understood was that the male often went down to the water's edge and appeared to bring back to the nest a beakfull of mud. On these occasions there was generally no calling except for a subdued chatter on the to and fro flights. When apparently collecting mud it would always go to the same spot at the base of the reed stem at the water's edge, alighting on the stem and then moving deliberately down to water level. It could more easily have landed directly on the ground. It would work away at completing a beakfull of material before flying back up to the nest site. Thirteen separate beak movements were counted to complete a load.

The male was also seen to regularly carry away what appeared to be discarded nest building materials from the nest site.

At the height of nest building activity the male could complete five reed cuts in five minutes and then make six consecutive 'mud collections' in rapid time. Most nest building activity was early in the morning, the bird being difficult to locate at midday. Nesting material was collected within 10 m of the nest except on one occasion the male made a long flight of 60 m across the corner of the lagoon where it cut and brought back a long length of reed.

Occasionally the male would settle on top of the reeds and call loudly. Sometimes up to three males were seen in the vicinity of the nest which prompted much calling. Males were also seen at other locations.

After the first observation on 29 April the only other time a female was seen was on 10 May. After twenty-five minutes of constant activity by the male he was absent for twelve minutes. With an explosion of calls, three birds came to the nest site, two males and a female. The two males engaged in aggressive activity one chasing the other. The female went directly into cover at the nest site. Only one male returned from the chase (presumably the nest builder) and immediately commenced leaf cutting and nest building, with some strips about 40cm long, the longest seen. It then delivered a quite beautiful song from the nest site, as opposed to the repeated chatter heard in previous visits. There was no further sign of the female. Early in the morning on 13 May the male was seen at the top of a reed at the nest site preening vigorously and calling. It dropped into the nest site and two minutes later reappeared carrying nest material and flew south out of the reed area. After five minutes it returned apparently chasing a female house sparrow *Passer domesticus* which continued on its way as the male dropped into the nest site. Some time later this manoeuvre was repeated, and the male returned again, apparently shepherding two female house sparrows and all three made as if to go down to the nest site but only the streaked weaver did so, the two house sparrows perching on reeds nearby. It was deduced from this behaviour that in the absence of female weavers the male was extending its efforts to attract a mate to other species. A few minutes later the male reappeared and cut three further strips and continued work on the nest. Finally it perched on the highest reed top and burst into its full song.

Nest building and song were observed on 18 May but the last observations were on 22 May, when two males were again found at the nest site, calling and in full song.

In July mechanical reed clearance was in progress in the vicinity of the nest site so we decided to inspect, photograph and retrieve the nest. It was only partially complete and like an upturned basket with the handle towards the ground from which the male performed its calling routine. It was attached to only one reed stem and was built over water. The most puzzling aspect was that we could find no evidence of the mud which we had apparently seen the male collecting so assiduously. There was no trace of mud either inside or outside of the nest. We checked the reed area carefully but did not find any other nests.

It is well known that most weaver species are inveterate nest builders and nest building is no proof of breeding. On this occasion we gained no proof of breeding but had there been (more) females breeding may well have progressed.

The appearance of this group of weavers on 29 April after severe storms was mysterious. The normal western limit of the range of the streaked weaver is Pakistan. At first we thought it possible they were storm driven to Arabia by the east-south-east winds, but the winds could have, just as easily, dislodged another feral population from elsewhere in the Gulf. Alternatively they could have been escapes from a consignment of wild birds brought to Saudi Arabia for the pet trade that co-incided with the storm.

Eamon Sarson, 10 Knoll Road, Abergavenny, Gwent NP7 7AN, UK

Mike Athendriou, Saudi Arabian Bechtel Co., PO Box 3477, Dammam 31471, Saudi Arabia.

REPORTING PROCEDURES: BREEDING EVIDENCE CODES FOR CUCKOOS

With the discovery that the Eurasian cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* probably breeds in Arabia (in addition to Klaas's and didric cuckoos *Chrysococcyx klaas* and *C. caprius*) observers need to note a special variation of the Breeding Evidence Code (BEC) which relates to brood parasites. Finding a young cuckoo, or a cuckoo's egg, in a nest, is confirmed breeding for *both* the cuckoo and the host species.

There is still virtually no information available for Arabian breeding *Chrysococcyx* cuckoos but in Africa Klaas's cuckoo *C. klaas* parasitises the nests of small insectivorous passerines such as warblers and sunbirds and the didric cuckoo *C. caprius* parasitises weavers. Note that the great spotted cuckoo *Clamator glandarius* breeds in coastal areas of the African side of the southern Red Sea and in the Ethiopian highlands. This makes it a good possibility for breeding in south west Arabia. It lays its eggs in the nests of crows and starlings.

OMAN BIRD RECORDS

Bird recording in the Sultanate of Oman is now handled by the Oman Bird Records Committee (OBRC) which was established in 1986. The aim of OBRC is to collect all reports of birds observed in Oman, to serve as a rarity committee, to periodically produce an official list of birds of Oman (the *Oman Bird List*) and to encourage conservation and protection of birds in the Sultanate.

The committee has at present six members: Ralph Daly (Chairman), Michael Gallagher (Secretary), Matt Cummins, David Foster, Hilary Fry, and myself as

Recorder. Scarce species (those with less than ten accepted records) require acceptance from all members. Usually the observer fills out a Rare Bird Report and/or submits photographs to the committee. The Recorder sends a photocopy of the claim along with a cover note detailing previously accepted records to each member. If all members do not accept the claim at this stage, it is discussed at the next meeting. We often seek help from experts abroad, especially from the British Museum (Natural History) and from members of the British Birds Rarity Committee. The latest *Oman Bird List* (third edition) is dated 28 February 1990. At present 425 species have been accepted.

All regular contributors of bird observations are members of the Oman Bird Group (OBG). There is no membership fee but everybody receives the *Oman Bird News*, edited by Michael Gallagher and issued twice yearly. This publication has grown into a very interesting newsletter with many articles on the birdlife of Oman and nearby areas. At present, OBG does not arrange field trips or talks since these are already organised by the Historical Association of Oman of which most birdwatchers in the capital area are members.

I joined OBRC in 1987 and became Recorder two years later. By this time the Oman Central Records (in the form of a card index) contained some 5,000 cards, listing an estimated 60,000 records. It was clear to me that the way to go would be to computerise the records.

A database management system was developed in Foxbase+ (compatible with dBaseIII+, but much quicker). The system consists of four databases. The main database containing each bird record lists the species by Euring number, the observer as a three letter code, the number of birds seen, the site as another three letter code, the first and last date of a given observation, breeding evidence code as used by ABBA, sex and the age of the birds if known. In addition it is possible to include any further comments, long or short. The second database is a list of the species on the *Oman Bird List* and also contains information of where each species has been recorded in each of the five geographical regions that the country has been divided into. The third database is a list of all observers who have contributed with records, including addresses and telephone numbers where known. Finally, the fourth database is a listing of all bird sites in Oman giving the three-letter code, the ABBA square, and the exact latitude and longitude. By combining the main database with each of the three supporting ones it is possible to extract and present the data in a variety of ways. The system becomes extremely powerful by devising computer programmes written in the Foxbase language.

As an example we can produce a histogram based on 10-day intervals for any species over the whole country or in a given area or period. We can produce a list of all species observed in a specific site. We can list all records for Qurm Nature Reserve for the second half of September between 1980 and 1990 if we so desire. We

can print out a list of records for any observer ordered by species, dates or sites. Extracting data for ABBA has become a simple routine. The possibilities are endless and really only limited by one's imagination.

However, some of these jobs will require transferring all records from the index cards to the computer database. So far all records for 285 out of the 425 species have been transferred. In addition, all records for all species since 1 January 1989 have been added directly to the computer. Adding new records to the computer database is far quicker than adding them to index cards. Many of the regular contributors are now using a special form which makes data transfer extremely easy. In all, the main database now contains over 62,000 records. My wife, Hanne, is helping with this work and we hope to have the whole job finished in a couple of years. For safety reasons, two backup copies are made regularly and stored at different locations in case of a mishap.

Bird recording in Oman has come a long way since Mrs Effie Warr started her private listing many years ago. Yet our present system is still based upon her original card index.

Jens Eriksen, Recorder, OBRC, PO Box 246 Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.

RECENT REPORTS

Some Atlas reports are especially interesting, perhaps on account of the species concerned, an unexpected location or habitat, an unusual time of breeding or a large number of birds involved. The following are a selection of some of the more interesting, unexpected or unusual records of Arabian breeding birds received within the last 12 months; some relate to earlier years. Reports of unusual breeding birds often get reported by more than one observer. Care is taken to credit records as appropriately as possible, so apologies if the original finder of a rare bird is not properly identified.

Night heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Two nests found in a tree (*Prosopis juliflora*) at Dubai in August 1992. It appears at least four birds fledged, (C. Richardson). Since the first Arabian breeding described by D James in *Phoenix* 8:3-4 (from near Riyadh in 1992), T Nightingale has drawn attention to the breeding of this species at al Areen Wildlife Centre, Bahrain in 1986 and 1987. On that occasion it was not known for sure whether one or both of the adults involved were truly wild birds, as free flying introduced birds were also present at the centre.

Reef heron *Egretta gularis*

A colony comprising 186 nests were found on Zal island (QA30), including some nests with chicks 1-4 weeks old, 26 May 1991 (M I Evans et al). One immature white-

phase approximately 80kms inland at Thumrait (UA12), Dhofar, Oman, 26 February 1992 (C Richardson, M.C.J.).

Lammergeyer *Gypaetus barbatus*

Regular in the Asir Province of Saudi Arabia (e.g. squares IA13, IA14) in 1985 but not a single bird has been seen there from July 1990 to December 1992 despite regular watching. (A J Stagg).

Egyptian vulture *Neophron percnopterus*

A pair tried to nest inside an aircraft hangar in January 1991 on Masirah island (YB18); two eggs were laid before the nest was damaged. (Oman Central Record).

Lappet-faced vulture *Torgos tracheliotus*

Ten just north of al Ain (VB35), UAE, 20 February 1992 (C Richardson, M.C.J.). This is the largest number ever recorded in the UAE.

Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus*

An immature Jeddah, Spring 1992 (H R Millar).

Verreaux's eagle *Aquila verreauxii*

Confirmed breeding in two squares in 1991 in Dhofar province Oman, (Oman Central Record).

Bonelli's eagle *Hieraaetus fasciatus*

Pair feeding young in the nest, northern Oman (YB23), February 1991 (Oman Central Record).

Sooty falcon *Falco concolor*

One 260 kms inland at Jebel Bard (EB31), central Arabia, 1 May 1992, (MCJ). This is the first inland record for this part of Arabia. On 1 May it is likely to have just arrived from its non-breeding quarters. The record opens the possibility that the species may occur as a breeding bird at isolated jebels in the interior of Arabia, as it does in Sinai.

Chukar partridge *Alectoris chukar*

Previous observations have suggested that this species is extremely rare in the Musandam area of northern Oman. However in 1992 it was found to be locally common (WA28) with much calling noted in March and young birds in June, in the 800-1000 metre altitude range, (C Richardson, R Morris, MCJ).

Grey francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus*

One (PB30) north of Tarut Bay, Eastern Province, November 1991 (C Harbard, P Symens). This species has been introduced to Bahrain and several UAE islands in recent years but this isolated occurrence on the mainland is surprising.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Three chicks near Jubail (PB31), 23 April 1991 (M I Evans et al).

Little tern *Sterna albifrons*

Up to eight pairs raised about 10 young at a small marsh/rubbish tip near al Khobar (QA29); eggs on 15 May 1992. Nests were adjacent to a black-winged stilt *Himantopus himantopus* colony. (G. Ramsay).

Palm dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*

Present at most human settlements in central Oman, February 1992 (C Richardson, MCJ).

Rose-ringed parakeet *Psittacula krameri*

Adults entering lamp post nest, near Qatif (QA30), Eastern Province, 20 May 1991, (S Baha el Din). There are still very few records of this species at nest sites.

Bruce's scops owl *Otus brucei*

One or two calling Wadi Bih (WA28), northern UAE, 1 March 1992 (R Morris, MCJ).

Plain nightjar *Caprimulgus inornatus*

Two seen and one found dead, 6 June 1992 south west Saudi Arabian highlands, (A J Stagg).

Dunn's and bar-tailed desert lark *Eremalauda dunni* and *Ammodramus cincturus*

Both Dunn's lark and bar-tailed desert lark were singing and paired in the desert of southern Oman (TB12), late February 1992. (C Richardson, MCJ).

Black bushchat *Cercotrichas podobe*

One Dubai (VA27), 15-19 April 1992 (C Richardson). An exceptional record for a species which has colonised much of central Arabia in the last 20 years - will it now do the same in the UAE?

Graceful warbler *Prinia gracilis*

One singing central Arabia (HB32) north east of Hail, late March 1992 (P Symens). First record for this region. The nearest records are the isolated colony at Buraydah, at least 250 kms to the south east.

Reed warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Bred Dubai, young seen June 1992, (C Richardson). First breeding record for UAE.

Magpie *Pica pica*

This very local species has been found in a new square in south west Saudi Arabia, at Jebel Qaha (IB12), September 1991, (A J Stagg).

Yellow-throated sparrow *Petronia xanthocollis*

Up to 100 on passage, April and May 1991 at Tanaqib (OB32), northeast Saudi Arabia, (S Baha el din).

Trumpeter finch *Bucanetes githagineus*

Several records obtained in 1992 in the northern UAE foothills (WA28), previously quite scarce, (R B Morris, C Richardson et al).

Sinai rose-finch *Carpodacus synoicus*

A small group at Jebel Bard (EB31), 1 May 1992, was some 120 kms further east than previously recorded (MCJ). Jebel Bard is an isolated sandstone outcrop.

Corn bunting *Miliaria calandra*

Three Digdaga (VB28) Ras al Khaymah, 28 February and 1 March 1992, included a male in song. (J Bannon, R Morris, MCJ).

CHESTNUT-BELLIED SANDGROUSE ON GHANADAH ISLAND UAE

From May to late August 1991 chestnut-bellied sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus* were observed regularly on Ghanadah Island (UB26) on the eastern Gulf coast of Abu Dhabi Emirate.

Ghanadah Island is a small island that was created relatively recently when a narrow channel was cut through the neck of a peninsula jutting into Khor Ghanadah. The island is privately owned by Sheikh Khalifa, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi. The native vegetation was originally typical of the coastal sand dunes of the northern Emirates. South-west of Ghanadah Island the coast breaks up into a series sabkha flats and low calcareous islands that constitute the drowned coast-line of Abu Dhabi Emirate.

The native vegetation on the low calcareous dunes on the island which rise to approximately 2-8 m in height, consisted of dwarf shrub steppe of *Panicum turgidum* and *Cyperus conglomeratus*. Important subsidiary species within the community included *Heliotropium kotschyi*, *Lotus garcinii*, *Helianthemum lippii* and *Convolvulus cephalopopus*. The cover of the dunes was estimated to be 20%. Low lying parts of the island (no more than 2 m above sea level), were sparsely covered by low *Limonium axillare* and *Cyperus conglomeratus* dominated shrubland. Subsidiary species within this community included *Heliotropium kotschyi*, *Suaeda aegyptiaca*, *Zygophyllum*

qatarense, and *Sphaerocoma aucheri*. *Halopeplis setifera* was locally dominant in inter-dune depressions.

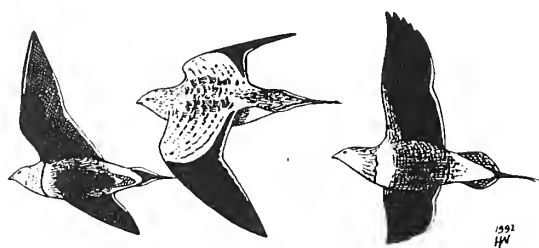


Fig 3. Chestnut-bellied sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus* have bred much further west in the UAE in recent years.

Extensive changes have been made to the soil and vegetation of the island in recent years. Channels have been dredged around the island and shallow offshore mudflats have been planted with the native mangrove *Avicennia marina*. Much of the island's surface has been covered with topsoil from various inland regions to a depth of up to 1 m. Vegetative communities that have colonised the top-soil vary significantly from the native vegetation.

In May 1991 up to 40 chestnut-bellied sandgrouse were seen daily on the island usually feeding in an area which has been covered in two types of topsoil. The first type of topsoil was gathered from the al Ain region of Abu Dhabi. This sand is characteristically red desert sand and supports a *Cyperus conglomeratus* dominated shrubland with an estimated cover of 40%. Important subsidiary species (which appear to be flowering and in seed throughout the summer) include the legumes *Indigofera articulata*, *Rhynchosis schimperi* and *Lotus garcinii*, the grasses *Panicum turgidum* and *Astenatherum forskalii* and *Heliotropium kotschyi*. The second type of topsoil is a beige coloured calcareous sand of unknown origin. It supports a *Panicum turgidum* - *Heliotropium kotschyi* shrubland with a cover of approximately 34%. Important subsidiary species on this area include *Cyperus conglomeratus*, *Cornulaca monacantha*, and the grass *Astenatherum forskalii*. *Zygophyllum hamiense* is locally dominant.

The areas where the sandgrouse have been observed have drip irrigation lines placed under the surface of the topsoil. Water is dripped from outlets protruding above the surface of the sand for several hours each morning. Exotic plants such as *Salvadora persica* have been planted next to these outlets. The effect of this form of drip irrigation on the vegetation appears to be restricted to the area immediately surrounding the outlet. The unusually high vegetation cover found on these parts of Ghanadah Island may be partly due to irrigation but the primary cause is almost certainly the lack of grazing and browsing on the island. In the morning (between 0800-1000 hrs) sandgrouse came to drink fresh water at a trough, put out for pinioned houbara bustards *Chlamydotis uindulata*. They arrived to drink in small flocks of up to 15 birds and could be observed quite closely. Having drunk the birds frequently lingered in

the area of the trough and males were seen being aggressive towards one another, parading around with their breast feathers puffed out. According to Richardson, 1990; *The Birds of the United Arab Emirates* the species should have bred by late May and this is supported by Jaradi, 1988; *Sandgrouse 10*, who found two nests each containing two eggs in early May at the base of Jebel Hafeet. Cramp and Simmons, 1985; *Birds of the Western Palearctic* (Vol 4) state that the breeding season in Somalia and Saudi Arabia is April to June, and February to April in North-west India (but also November and December). All the birds observed on Ghanadah Island in May appeared to be adults.

In August 1991 single birds or pairs were flushed regularly all over the island. In the early morning birds were regularly seen taking water from the trough and even dipping their breast feathers into the water. The birds arrived in ones and twos and left the area as soon as they had drunk. In late August young birds were observed flying with adults on many occasions and young were also observed drinking at the trough. The first young birds observed flying were approximately 75% the size of the adult birds. Up to 25 pairs are estimated to have bred on the island.

On 22 August a pair of sandgrouse were disturbed by the main track leading on to the island no more than 200 m from the sea. The adults flew approximately 100 m away before landing. It was then realised that there was a young bird sitting motionless 3-4 m away (allowing photographs to be taken). The young bird was only 50% the length of the adults. The adult birds, suddenly called and the young bird sprinted away towards them after initially flying 3-4 m. It appears that, like young game birds, young sandgrouse can fly, if only poorly, well before they are fully grown.

Small flocks of 3-4 birds were seen regularly in late August usually consisting of adults and one or two young birds. These were presumably family parties.

In 1991 the chestnut-bellied sandgrouse on Ghanadah Island, were observed to breed in the summer months of July and August. This is outside the breeding period reported for the UAE and Arabia of April to June but it is possible the readily available supply of food and water on this well vegetated, ungrazed island may have allowed these birds to extend their breeding season into the extreme heat of the summer months. It appears that chestnut-bellied sandgrouse, like other birds of this harsh environment, have a dynamic breeding season that enables them to exploit suitable conditions when they occur.

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IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS IN THE MIDDLE EAST PROJECT

Ornithologically, the Middle East is rich. Its diversity of environments - desert, wetlands and mountains in particular - provide habitats for 23 globally threatened bird species and 60 species which are virtually restricted to the Middle East. Some of the largest and/or most diverse wetland, steppe, desert and marine ecosystems in the world are found within the Middle East, upon which millions of birds depend to provide breeding, stop-over or wintering sites. These sites' very high value to birds reflects their overall ecological importance.

In recent years several inventories and directories of the most important sites for wildlife have been published as major tools for implementing conservation action. For example, wetland inventories and protected area directories exist for most regions of the world, and recently a comprehensive directory of the *Important Bird Areas in Europe* has been published and is now widely used by governments as a guide to conservation action. The need to give decision-makers up-to-date information on the most critical areas for conserving birds and habitats in the Middle East is now urgent, given the rapid increases in human population, agricultural intensification and industrialisation, heralding increased levels of grazing, wetland drainage and pollution, woodland clearance and coastal land-claim.

To answer these needs, the *Important Bird Areas in the Middle East* project has been launched, and will be coordinated by the International Council for Bird Preservation, as a joint venture with the Ornithological Society of the Middle East, in close collaboration with relevant national agencies and the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau, with funding from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (UK). The project seeks to produce the first comprehensive directory of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in the Middle East, taking in the following countries; Afghanistan, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Emphasis is being given to engaging maximum participation by governmental and non-governmental conservation bodies and academic institutions in the region. The main objectives of the project are as follows:

1. to produce a directory and database of sites of international and regional importance for birds, providing key information for the conservation of the region's avifauna and habitats, in an objective manner;
2. to inform decision-makers and planners at all levels of the existence and importance of these vital sites;
3. to encourage the development and implementation of national conservation strategies and in particular to promote the development of national protected area programmes;

4. to promote the implementation of, and active participation in, global and regional agreements, e.g. the Ramsar Convention;

5. to help to identify future priorities for action in bird conservation and research in the Middle East, in terms of important sites, species, habitats and threats.

The Middle East IBA project will culminate in the publication of a *Directory of Important Bird Areas in the Middle East* in Arabic and English languages. This will consist of a series of national inventories, each with a general introduction to bird conservation in the country concerned, a country map showing the location of the Important Bird Areas, and a series of detailed site accounts. Information will be gathered from all available sources, e.g. governmental and non-governmental environmental organisations, individuals, scientists, protected areas' staff, natural history museums, research institutions, universities, and cartographic centres. In some countries, the best way to achieve this might be through the appointment of national coordinators or "IBA Working Groups". An IBA data-sheet has been produced to facilitate the compilation of data, and is being distributed to potential contributors throughout the region. All proposed Important Bird Areas will be considered, and all their values taken into account. The criteria used in the selection of sites for inclusion in the Directory have been developed with help from Middle Eastern wildlife conservation organisations and individual experts.

All organisations and individuals with an interest in bird conservation in the Middle East are invited to participate in this project, and are kindly requested to contact the Project Coordinator, Mike Evans, for further information.

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THE STATUS OF SOME ESCAPED SPECIES OF BIRDS IN BAHRAIN

The State of Bahrain comprises a few relatively small islands, which hold no more than 25 indigenous breeding bird species. The popularity of keeping cagebirds and the absence of predators has created conditions for a number of escaped birds to establish themselves. We review here the present status of these species. With the recent return to the island of RK (who lived in Bahrain in the seventies), we thought it would be appropriate to make a comparison of the present status of these escaped birds with the situation 15 years ago.

Birding for escapes is obviously not attractive for many birders, but we feel it is important to document the occurrence of these species as a record of their establishment on Bahrain and the effect their expansion may have in future on indigenous species.

The birds detailed below are considered to be quite common and seem likely to establish themselves. Other species, including budgerigars *Melopsittacus undulatus*, macaws, lovebirds, hill mynas *Gracula religiosa*, black-headed munias *Lonchura malacca*, bishops, painted storks *Mycteria leucocephala* and saker falcons *Falco cherrug*, have been observed on Bahrain but we do not deal with them here as they are rare and have shown no indication of breeding.

Grey francolin *Francolinus pondiceranus*

This species is now one of the most common breeding species in Bahrain. It was introduced to al Areen around 1981 (Nightingale & Hill, in press; Birds of Bahrain) and has now spread all over Bahrain and Muharraq islands, in gardens and desert areas alike. Single partridge type birds seen in 1977 were presumably grey francolins and it seems plausible that the species may even have been introduced privately before the al Areen introduction. It is not widely persecuted or exploited for the table but single birds are occasionally found for sale in the bird markets.

Eurasian collared dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Known under the local name of "Ya Kareem" this species has been (and still is) commonly imported from the Indian subcontinent and Iran for a long time. Birds were released in the sixties both in Bahrain and in Qatar where they then bred in the wild (Dr Saeed Muhammad verbally). Numbers have increased enormously since and it is now one of the most numerous birds in Bahrain, causing damage to crops. It has been considered that this species' invasion of Arabia has been part of its expansion through Europe, but we suggest that it could equally have been introduced to Arabia since early breeding records in Bahrain coincide with reported releases.

Ring-necked parakeet *Psittacula krameri*

A small population has been present since at least 1953 and the species is now quite common. The population seems to be at about the same level as in 1977. Newly fledged juveniles are regularly seen in spring and the species must surely nest although no nests have been found in recent years. Large congregations, sometimes of up to 300, roost during the winter in date gardens in Manama. Birds flying high to their evening roosts are commonplace along the west and north coasts of Bahrain island. They are much less common during May to September, which fits in with a regular influx of the species in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia during these months (Bundy et al, 1989; *Birds of the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia*). The extent and reason of this migration would definitely be an interesting subject to study. Ring-necked parakeets are regularly sold at the bird markets, such birds are imported from the Indian subcontinent as well as being trapped locally with the help of decoy birds.

Alexandrine parakeet *Psittacula eupatria*

This species has been recorded free-flying since 1989; its similarity with ring-necked parakeet has probably obscured its previous status. Since September 1991 small groups have regularly been observed in gardens in Busaytin, Muharraq, south-eastern Manama and the Sehla area of Manama and it seems likely to establish itself. It is regularly sold at the bird markets, but in much smaller numbers than ring-necked parakeets.

Blossom-headed parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala*

A small group of five individuals have been present in a housing compound at Diraz, Budaiya since at least 1989. The population does not seem to increase and we expect them to eventually become extinct. It is rarely recorded in the bird markets.

Red-vented bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*

During 1989-1992 there were four observations of this bird from the Bahrain Fort area, Isa Town and Nabih Saleh. It is commonly sold at the bird markets but very few seem to survive in the wild and we know of no cases in Bahrain of hybrids (as reported from the UAE; Richardson, 1990; *The Birds of the United Arab Emirates*) between it and white-cheeked bulbul *P. leucogenys*.

Indian house crow *Corvus splendens*

Unlike the other areas of the Middle East where this species has been introduced, the population in Bahrain has been fairly stable and of low numbers. One or two pairs are suspected to nest in the Mina Salman area of Manama (juveniles recorded in April) and singles are occasionally seen outside the breeding season along the west and north coasts. The latter birds could come from the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia where larger numbers occur (Bundy et al 1989). The species has been present since at least 1970.

Common myna *Acridotheres tristis*

First recorded in Bahrain in 1977 and is now well established in residential areas. Breeding has been reported from Badan farm in 1990 (Sh. Rashid bin Ibrahim Mohammad al Khalifa, pers comm) and Meerouge farm in 1992 (Sh. Noora bint Isa al Khalifa) and pairs are regularly recorded at presumed breeding sites in Busaytin and Arad on Muharraq island, Manama, around Bahrain Fort, Janabiyah and Hamalah during spring. Congregates in flocks during winter, especially at Badan farm but also at Busaytin where birds feeding in fields around Dair and Ghalali villages, Muharraq, come to roost.

Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata*

Two recorded late winter and early spring 1992 with house sparrows *Passer domesticus* at Hamalah farm. Commonly sold in the bird markets.

Indian silverbill *Euodice malabarica*

Apparently first recorded in 1978 and a nest was found at Jurdab in February 1988. It now seems to be well-established in semi-desert areas in northwestern Bahrain, notably around Hamad Town where parties of juveniles have been seen. It is a common cagebird imported from the Indian subcontinent and usually painted in bright colours before going on sale. Such brightly painted birds are occasionally seen in flocks of free-flying silverbills. There seems to be a westward colonisation of Indian silverbills through central Arabia which might also be a result of wild birds spreading. The species has even been recorded in Israel in recent years.

Red avadavat *Amandava amandava*

First observed in 1981. The species has been present since 1989 in a reedbed at Janabiyah, where they almost certainly breed. During summer and early autumn small groups have been seen in sorghum fields of Muharraq and Bahrain island. Commonly sold at the bird markets.

Baya weaver *Ploceus philippinus*

A colony with an old nest was found at Saar in 1987 but there have been no records since.

Black-throated weaver *Ploceus benghalensis*

Single birds turned up in flocks of house sparrow *Passer domesticus* and Dead Sea sparrow *Passer moabiticus* during the winter of 1991/92 in the Hamalah region and at Ghalali, Muharraq. It has never been recorded by EH for sale in the bird markets. The closest natural breeding areas are in the Sind Province of Pakistan (Ali & Ripley, 1987; *Compact Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan*).

Streaked weaver *Ploceus manyar*

Present in small flocks all year round since 1990 in a reedbed at Janabiyah where they must breed. Not often recorded for sale in the bird markets.

We would like to thank Tom Nightingale and Mike Hill for allowing us to quote from their forthcoming book on the birds of Bahrain and Dr Saeed Muhammad and Dr Jaime Samour for commenting on a first draft.

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ESCAPES AND INTRODUCTIONS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

There is a thriving trade in exotic birds in the Emirates which appears to be little controlled by the authorities. Birds arrive by trading dhow from India, Pakistan, Zanzibar and other parts of Africa. Often thousands of parrots and parakeets, bulbuls, waxbills, munias, mynahs and finches can be seen packed into cages for sale at local souqs. Many escape by accident or some are deliberately released by families prior to going away for the summer recess. It is common to find local parks in Abu Dhabi and Dubai alive with red bishops *Euplectes orix*, budgerigars *Melopsittacus undulatus*, weavers and male red-headed buntings *Emberiza bruniceps* from June to August, throwing bird recording procedures into chaos.

Sometimes flocks will occur together in the wild, giving the impression of a natural influx. Examples of this are dozens of crested mynah *Acridotheres fuscus* which appeared in Dubai in the mid-eighties (and took two years to 'die-out') and pied mynah *Sturnus contra* which has been seen in a number of Gulf cities from Sharjah to Abu Dhabi, even recorded breeding. Other smaller finches and weavers are imported by well-meaning people who release them in and around their villas to give additional colour to the landscape. This appears to be the case with red avadavat *Amandava amandava*, masked weaver *Ploceus intermedius* and streaked weaver *P. manyar* in Dubai and Sharjah.

Significant imports are made by both Government and private zoos of large exotic species including herons, wildfowl, cranes, partridges and some birds of prey. Al Ain zoo rears hundreds (if not thousands) of black francolin *Francolinus francolinus* and other game birds which are released into newly forested desert areas in the western part of the UAE and on to Sir Bani Yas (SB25), Abu al Abyadh (TB25) and other private islands. Quails *Coturnix coturnix* are reared privately in considerable numbers as a feedstock in zoos and some must escape. There is even a recent report of house crows *Corvus splendens* being imported to Dubai from Sri Lanka. All these introductions are bound to have an effect on the country's avifauna and commerce. It has already been observed that the common mynah *Acridotheres tristis* is displacing palm dove *Streptopelia senegalensis* in the towns, and rose-ringed parakeets *Psittacula krameri* are damaging crops everywhere. House crows are increasing on the Gulf coast driving out less aggressive residents and migrant visitors.

The list below gives an indication of the status of these invaders up to September 1992:

Sacred ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus*

There is a large free-flying population at al Ain zoo, numbering about 300, although they rarely wander far from the zoo boundaries. Smaller numbers, also free-

flying, are on Sir Bani Yas Island and others are reportedly in private collections. Records in the UAE include two at Khor Dubai in October 1982, one on flooded salt flats near Jebel Ali on 5 February 1992 and one in Sharjah from mid June to August 1992. Genuine wild birds could occur in the UAE but their occurrence would be difficult to prove with such large, free-flying, introduced populations.

Mute swan *Cygnus olor*

At least four were introduced about 1989 to Sir Bani Yas Island and a pair nested there in April 1989. A report of three seen in Abu Dhabi in December 1984 coincides with a sighting on Bahrain at around the same date and these have been accepted as genuine vagrants. Future records of wild birds may be difficult to justify.

Egyptian goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

Introduced to Sir Bani Yas Island about 1980 where it breeds ferally, with 200 or so counted there in 1989. A free-flying pair fledged, eight young on Abu Dhabi island in early May 1989 and sightings are regular at Abu Dhabi's Western Road lagoons, where birds are probably now self-sustaining.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Birds were introduced in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Sir Bani Yas Island from the early to mid 1980's. Confusion now arises in identifying genuine migrants and winter visitors.

Chukar *Alectoris chukar*

The Iranian sub-species *werae* breeds in the Musandam area, including the high plateau area above Wadi Bih, (WA28), where the breeding season appears to be from February to June. Large numbers have been introduced on Sir Bani Yas Island, recorded from 1989, and many are in private collections including at Dubai. A large number were released in the al Ain area in 1982, with some reported breeding (Ramadan-Jaradi 1988; *Sandgrouse* 10).

Grey francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus*

A very vocal and widespread resident, particularly in the Northern Emirates where ideal habitat is available. Usually found in cultivations, parks, gardens and scrub with dense cover and available water nearby. Can be found even in remote mountain cultivations. It is still relatively scarce south and west of a line from al Ain to Jebel Ali where there is little but open desert and sabkha plains. A few records from Abu Dhabi, mostly in Bateen wood. Hundreds on Sir Bani Yas Island are introduced, probably in the early 1980's. Rarely persecuted and few seen in bird markets. Urban birds in Dubai may have been introduced (F.E. Warr pers comm.). Forty years ago it was restricted to the Batinah, Ras al Khaimah and inland cultivated areas such as Ad Dhayd. (Guichard & Goodwin, 1952; *Ibis* 94:294-305). Gallagher & Woodcock

(1980); *Birds of Oman* note that the subspecies in Oman (and probably wild birds in UAE) is also found in south east Iran and nearby regions to the east, but not India.

Black francolin *Francolinus francolinus*

Introduced in abundance to Sir Bani Yas Island in the early 1980's and appeared feral by 1989. Reportedly introduced in large numbers in Abu Dhabi's western region (per G.Ramadan-Jaradi) from breeding stock in al Ain zoo, though few reports have reached me of sightings in such areas. One or two reported in Abu Dhabi in May 1977 and September 1979 were probably escaped or introduced birds.

Alexandrine parakeet *Psittacula eupatria*

Rarely identified by inexperienced observers, but evidence is now strong of several breeding populations in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. One or two pairs have bred around Abu Dhabi's fort (J.N.B. Brown pers.comm.) and are present year-round at Zabeel and other Dubai localities. Young seen and heard in late May 1992 at Zabeel. Regularly sold at the bird markets in Dubai and Sharjah.

Rose-ringed parakeet *Psittacula krameri*

A popular cage bird, many imported from Pakistan and India. First reported in 1972, numbers are increasing in the suburbs along coastal areas from Dubai to Abu Dhabi, and it is now spreading to inland cultivations reaching pest proportions. Some are reportedly shot by farmers, and increasing efforts are taken to control its numbers. Its movements are not understood, as flocks have been seen leaving the Gulf coast heading north-west in March; numbers have also flown over Das Island heading in a similar direction. These migratory movements enhance its status and interest factor as a wild species.

Red-vented bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*

Steady introduction has provided the suburbs of Dubai and Abu Dhabi with a colourful addition to the local avifauna. It appears to represent no immediate threat to other species.

White-cheeked bulbul *Pycnonotus leucogenys*

The origins of this species are not so clear. Latterly many have been introduced, possibly from Pakistan. It is a possibility that some may occur naturally, spreading from populations in Bahrain and eastern Saudi Arabia, but there is no evidence for this. This bulbul appears to be more dynamic and is now being found at cultivations further inland. Orange-vented hybrids (with *P. cafer*) are sometimes confused with yellow-vented bulbul *P. xanthopygos*

Red-whiskered bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus*

No records until a pair was found nesting in a Dubai garden in 1985 when two young hatched in May (*Phoenix* 2:2).

None of the brood survived. The only other record is of one seen near a palace at Zabeel, Dubai in late February 1990.

Pied mynah *Sturnus contra*

First recorded in spring and summer of 1989 in a number of sites, including Sharjah's Ramtha tip and Dubai's Zabeel Water treatment plant, where nesting has been recorded March to August. Also recorded in ones and twos at Jebel Ali and Abu Dhabi.

Bank mynah *Acridotheres giuginiatus*

Small localised feral populations, probably originating from escaped or introduced birds. A very dynamic species, unrecorded some years, then has occurred following wet winters to take advantage of suitable habitat. About 100 birds reported in Abu Dhabi 1972/3 with smaller numbers in Dubai 1975/76 (Bundy & Warr 1980). Recently reported in al Ain in May 1989 and several flocks of 40 or more found at Digdaga, near Ras al Khaimah in 1991, providing evidence of further extension of range. However still relatively scarce in the UAE and difficult to find on demand.

Common mynah *Acridotheres tristis*

First reported in 1976 in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, where captive birds deliberately released (F.E. Warr pers. comm.). It is now thriving around towns and cities, and colonising new areas annually. Up to 1,000 birds congregate at dusk at two known roost sites in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. They are benefiting from the increase in grassed areas and agricultural plots, although it is not yet known if they are becoming a pest. They are undoubtedly noisy and aggressive and appear to be displacing palm doves *Streptopelia seugaleus* in some urban areas.

Brahminy mynah *Sturnus pagodarum*

First recorded in March 1988, when a pair seemed to be nesting on a palace wall at Zabeel, Dubai, though no young were seen. Also reported there regularly in 1992. Also single birds at Bu Hasa in the western desert in 1990 (probably escapes) and in Sharjah in early 1992.

Masked weaver *Ploceus intermedius*

Established free-flying colony in al Jazeerah park, Sharjah, a result of a bulk release about 1984. Approximately 100 birds (male and female) counted in March 1989 when birds seen entering nests. There are still no other confirmed records outside the park.

Streaked weaver *Ploceus manyar*

Individuals, mostly males and therefore assumed escapes, reported in a variety of locations in Sharjah, Abu Dhabi and Dubai since the early 1980's. Seen in suitable reed nesting habitat at Ramtha tip several times since June 1989 and heard singing in spring (March-April)

1991 and 1992. Up to 12 males at Zabeel water treatment plant, Dubai in July 1992. A likely future coloniser, if females are also introduced.

Red avadavat *Amandava amandava*

Small numbers of escapes recorded over the years, often in flocks of up to ten. Reported nesting in Sharjah in June 1988 with fledgelings seen in September. It was heard singing in reeds at Ramtha tip in April 1992 and in the phragmites at the Zabeel water treatment plant, Dubai in May 1992.

Indian silverbill *Euodice malabarica*

This species is found nearly everywhere, including dry mountain wadis, remote oases, gardens and cultivations. Significant numbers have been introduced to confuse its true status in Dubai and other large cities and nomadic flocks on the Gulf coast sometimes have one or two coloured individuals amongst them, a novelty imposed on some munias by their importers. However the UAE is doubtless within this species' natural range, particularly in the north and east of the country. In Oman, where it is resident, Gallagher & Woodcock (1980) make no reference to any part of its population resulting from introduction.

Colin Richardson, PO Box 2825, Dubai, UAE.

PROGRESS SO FAR - BROWN-NECKED RAVEN

The brown-necked raven *Corvus ruficollis* occurs throughout Arabia, including some offshore islands, the highest mountains as well as the remotest of deserts. Because of this habitat flexibility and the ease with which it is observed it has been recorded more often and over a wider area than any other species. In many respects therefore the progress towards gathering information about the brown-necked raven reflects the overall progress of the project. With the data capture of observers records almost complete the draft map for the brown-necked raven now shows clearly how widespread it is. Indeed most of the gaps in its occurrence, e.g. the Nafud desert, eastern Saudi Arabia, eastern Yemen and the Empty Quarter, are more likely to reflect poor observer coverage than real absences. The current map of occurrence is at Fig 4. All current observers would do well to check out their local squares on this draft map, a square with no record for brown-necked raven is almost certainly very poorly covered so a days atlasing there would be very well spent and of great benefit to the project. Note that the numerical codes used on this map are not the Breeding Evidence Code on ABBA Form 2, but a computer code. A key to both the BEC and the computer codes can be found towards the end of this issue.

Even though the brown-necked raven is a common and widespread bird its breeding cycle and nidification are

still relatively poorly known. The following article shows how much useful information can be collected on a relatively common bird, almost in ones back garden. The breeding of very many common birds in Arabia is less well known than the brown-necked raven and observers are urged to consider contributing similar reports for species they have studied carefully.

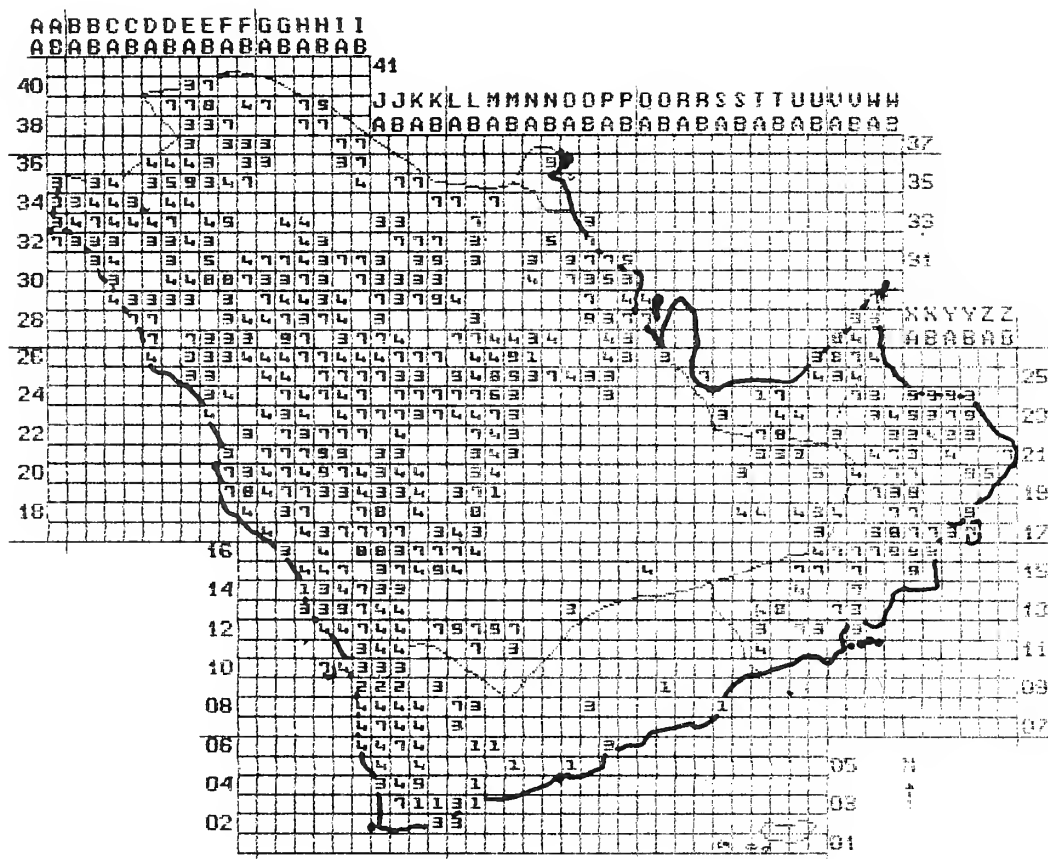


Fig 4. Arabia's most widespread breeding bird is the brown-necked raven *Corvus ruficollis*. The map shows its breeding distribution with 95% of observers records on the database.

BREEDING OBSERVATIONS ON THE BROWN-NECKED RAVEN IN SANA'A, REPUBLIC OF YEMEN

The brown-necked raven *Corvus ruficollis*, is a fairly common breeding resident of deserts and desert fringes, from the Cape Verde islands, east across the deserts of North Africa and the Middle East, to north west India, and north to Transcaspia and Turkestan. Its habitat preferences and general behaviour are described in the literature, but there appear to be few descriptions of the breeding cycle. In Arabia it nests in desert trees and on cliffs, in old buildings, pylons, even old osprey nests (*Phoenix* 4:7). In the spring and summer of 1992 we were able to watch two nests of brown-necked ravens in a wadi on the outskirts of Sana'a, (KA07) Republic of Yemen. The nests were approximately two kilometres apart and built on the crosspieces of electricity pylons. The line of pylons stretched along a broad wadi with intensive cultivation in small, well irrigated plots of vegetables, sorghum, melons and alf-alfa. The wadi was bordered by high jebel (summits

at 2,500-3,000 m) with scree, cactus scrub and escarpments of sheer cliffs, and contained a number of villages and isolated dwellings. There were considerable quantities of rubbish on open ground, including chicken carcasses and offal and rotting vegetables. One nest was sited on the topmost crosspiece of a pylon at an estimated height of 30 m (Nest 1) the other was approximately 10 m from the ground (Nest 2).

Observations at Nest 1 were generally made between 1530 hrs and 1830 hrs each day but it was possible occasionally to watch it in the early morning and early afternoon. During the three months of their breeding cycle, the adult birds rarely flew more than 1 km from the nest, and could usually be seen either perched on the nest or the adjacent cables, or feeding in an area close to the nest. The height of the nest precluded sight of its contents until the chicks were half-grown. Dates of laying and hatching were inferred from clear changes in behaviour.

Nest 1 was first noticed on 8 March. It was bulky, composed of sticks and small branches and appeared fresh and in good condition. As we were new to the area we were unable to say whether it was an old nest or not. The nest was visited twice in a half hour by a single adult raven carrying sticks which it placed on the nest. On 14 March two birds flew from the nest together and perched on the next pylon but by 18 March, one bird was seen sitting low on the nest. For the next three weeks the bird (presumed female) was never seen to leave the nest for longer than eight minutes. Her movements followed a consistent pattern. She stood up in the nest and preened for about five minutes, flew to feed within 200 m of the nest for about three minutes, returned to the nest, preened briefly before settling to brood. The presumed male rarely left the nest area, and was usually to be seen standing sentinel either on the crosspiece or on another cable adjacent to the pylon. On a number of occasions he flew off to mob intruding birds, and was once joined by the sitting female to attack a migrating flock of black kites *Milvus migrans* and two steppe eagles *Aquila nipalensis*.

It was apparent that the first chick hatched on 10 April as from then on the male bird visited the nest every five to eight minutes with food. On arrival, the sitting bird would stand up while the male regurgitated into the nest. He would then fly off and the female resumed sitting.

From 12 April both birds were seen feeding the young, each visiting the nest to regurgitate food about every ten minutes. No chicks were visible until 15 April when it was possible to see two upstretched bills at the approach of an adult bird. From time to time the female would sit and brood the chicks while the male continued to bring food, but with each succeeding day, the time she spent on the nest decreased as the demands for food increased. By 27 April the chicks had grown sufficiently to see partially feathered wings and backs of at least three young, one of which was noticeably bigger than the others and always managed to be at the head of the queue when food arrived. The chicks appeared three-quarter grown on 8 May and were standing in the nest. On 16 May it was possible for the first time to identify four young birds. There was much wing flapping and unsteady tottering about the nest but both adults now spent much time perched on adjacent cables, preening and watching the chicks, but only one feeding sortie was seen in forty minutes.

On 18 May two young were seen stepping out of the nest on to the metal crosspiece, with almost continual wing flapping and at 1745 hrs one bird appeared to overbalance and half fell, half glided to the ground in an adjacent vegetable patch. Both parent birds immediately flew to a nearby telegraph wire where they perched, calling continuously. After five minutes one bird returned to the nest to watch the other chicks, but the second adult repeatedly flew low over the grounded fledgling, enticing it to return, part walking and part flapping to the base of the pylon. The last chick left the nest on 22 May. Of the four young which fledged, two

were killed by cats within 24 hours of leaving the nest, the other two were seen flying strongly with their parents in the area for a week or so after leaving the nest.

Nest 2 was less accessible to us and was only visited weekly. Its cycle appeared to be ten days later than that of Nest 1. But territorial size, behaviour of the parent birds and interval between laying, hatching and fledging were similar. At least two young were successfully reared, fledging on 3 June.

The breeding dates of these two nests seem to confirm the suggestion (*Phoenix* 3:8) that pairs at higher altitudes in Arabia breed later than pairs on the desert plain. Details of the breeding cycle of brown-necked ravens do not appear to be well represented in the literature, and this report provides some important data on incubation, hatching and fledging intervals, and the behaviour of adults at the nest. Our observations indicate an incubation period of 23 days, the first chick left the nest 38 days after hatching and the last four days later. Both birds were seen to feed on chicken offal from a nearby farm which provided a plentiful supply on a daily basis. It was very noticeable how attentive the male bird was during both sitting and feeding, and how small was the area within which they confined their activity and food searching. In an area less intensively farmed and inhabited by humans, it may well have been necessary to range over a wider area to find an adequate food supply for four chicks. In the event, there appeared to be no overlap with the feeding territories of Nest 1 and Nest 2 which were only two kilometres apart. It was also very clear that the young birds are at their most vulnerable during the first twenty four hours after leaving the nest.

Derek and Meriel Harvey, PO Box 19751, Sana'a, Republic of Yemen.

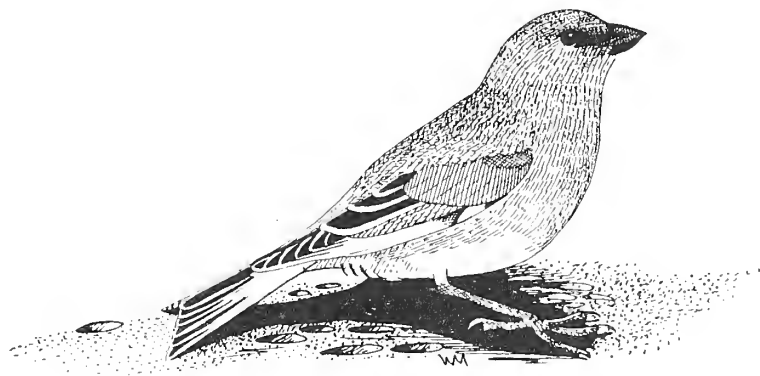


Fig 5. The desert finch *Rhodospiza obsoleta* has spread 1000 kms south east into central Arabia in the last few years.

SITES OF INTEREST

Atlas work is absorbing and rewarding. The common birds can be ticked off in each new square visited, the absence of expected birds becomes intriguing and a challenge and the presence of unexpected birds is always exciting. On each visit to a familiar square, one can try to upgrade the previous BEC's obtained. Because of the surprises and the fact that many parts of Arabia are still unexplored ornithologically, all sites can be of interest to the atlaser. In this column the aim is to provide details of the variety and diversity of bird habitats throughout Arabia and the representative birds to be found in each. This series of site reports is not meant to be a "where to watch birds in Arabia" or a directory to the most prolific bird sites, although a number of them are exceptionally good bird areas.

Observers are asked to submit details of other sites, especially those that they have studied reasonably well, drawing special attention to the breeding and resident species that occur. A site may be as small as a sewage pond or similar microsite, an urban area or a whole mountain range.

THE SEWAGE LAGOON AT THE KING FAHD INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, EASTERN PROVINCE, SAUDI ARABIA

King Fahd International Airport (which is still under construction) covers a huge area, approximately 25 km x 40 km of open desert and sabkha plains in ABBA square PB30. This area was previously occupied only by nomadic bedouin and their flocks. The site is relatively remote from the Eastern Province cities, the nearest town is Qatif 20 km to the east. The remoteness of the site, dictated that construction camps be established complete with all life support systems. Potable water is obtained from deep wells drilled on site and processed through a water treatment plant, and sewage disposal is accomplished by piping directly to a sewage settling lagoon in a low lying area of desert, within the perimeter fence, but several kilometres to the east of the major airport development.

The 200 m square sewage lagoon is retained by a rock embankment the top of which is designed to take maintenance vehicles, thus allowing access for vehicular based bird watching. The inlet pipe is located in the southwest corner which is also the point of access by way of a track. A permanent sewage treatment plant is included in the airport works but this had not been commissioned before my departure in mid 1990. Construction of the lagoon was completed in early 1985 but effluent was already being piped into the area prior to this.

There is no impermeable lining to the lagoon and it was soon noticed that upwelling of ground water was occurring in areas beyond the embankment. These areas

were soon colonised by reeds (*Phragmites*) and tamarisk shrubs, and became attractive to birds. By the winter of 1987/1988 the lagoon was full and effluent was allowed to run into the surrounding desert via an overflow pipe in the north east corner. No other control work was performed and the water was allowed to find its own direction and level.

By mid 1990 the original flat sandy area with scattered vegetation, separated by arcs of moving sand dunes, had been transformed into a complex of reed lined channels, ponds and lagoons. Reeds even invaded the main lagoon which led to a determined campaign in 1989/1990 by project management to eradicate them which was only partially successful.

The most conspicuous and dominant plants are the reeds which grow in dense wide fringes by each stretch of water. Interspersed with the reeds and in adjacent damp areas are clumps of tamarisk. The changing landscape attracted a whole new avifauna, embracing migrants, winter and summer visitors and a number of resident and breeding birds.

The distance of the lagoon from my work area was such that it was only practicable to visit it by car, which I did at lunchtime on most work days. I was usually able to make six visits a week. I established key viewing points from the car and found that most species accepted my presence. Approach on foot led to early flight or retreat into cover by many species. I explored the far boundaries of the site on foot at least once a week. I also did one or two short walks each week into selected areas which afforded me appreciable cover. During the major passage periods I made additional early morning visits. With this level of coverage it was possible to establish with reasonable certainty the status of resident and breeding species, note migration patterns and isolate unusual visitors.

The following is a summary of the breeding and potentially breeding species recorded during the period 1988 to 1990, which demonstrate the astonishing transformation of the area from desert to wetland.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*; bred each year, abundant and multi-brooded, chicks seen as late as 3 November.

Black-necked grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*; at least one pair present each year. Territory established and nest building recorded in May 1989.

Little bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*; bred each year, maximum four pairs.

Shoveler *Anas clypeata*; one pair bred each year 1988-1990. (See separate article, page 2).

Ferruginous duck *Aythya nyroca*; bred each year, estimated 14 pairs in 1989.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*; bred close to the lagoon each year.

Water rail *Rallus aquaticus*; several pairs located, one fledged young seen, July 1988.

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*; bred each year, abundant and multi-brooded, chicks appearing up to mid-November.

Black-winged stilt *Himantopus himantopus*; bred each year, estimated 20 pairs in 1988.

Kentish plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*; scattered pairs bred each year.

Little tern *Sterna albifrons*; about 30 pairs established territories in 1988 but later abandoned the site due to water level fluctuations; adult seen with chick 14 May 1990.

Rock dove *Columba livia*; visited the site but no evidence of breeding.

Eurasian collared dove *Streptopelia decaocto*; at least one pair bred in 1990.

Palm dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*; seen only once in October 1989.

Turtle dove *Streptopelia turtur*; one pair displaying and calling June 1989.

Namaqua dove *Oena capensis*; established in 1989, several pairs bred.

Barn owl *Tyto alba*; seen only once, July 1986. Could breed on the complex.

Eagle owl *Bubo bubo*; seen three times, could breed on the complex.

Black-crowned finchlark *Eremopterix nigriceps*; bred each year.

Hoopoe lark *Alaemon alaudipes*; bred each year.

Crested lark *Galerida cristata*; bred each year.

White-cheeked bulbul *Pycnonotus leucogenys*; regular throughout the year, probably bred but not proven.

Rufous bushchat *Cercotrichas galactotes*; several pairs present each year but breeding not confirmed.

Graceful warbler *Prinia gracilis*; bred each year, widespread and at least double brooded.

Moustached warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon*; widespread each year, calling and display but breeding not confirmed.

Reed warbler *Acrocephalus* sp; summer resident, apparently breeding each year, but not identified with certainty.

Great grey shrike *Lanius excubitor*; regular throughout the year, may breed.

Brown-necked raven *Corvus ruficollis*; bred on the complex, regularly visited the lagoon to scavenge.

House sparrow *Passer domesticus*; abundant, bred each year, in vicinity of the site.

Spanish sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*; one pair feeding young in vicinity of the site in 1990.

Streaked weaver *Ploceus manyar*; nest building observed in 1989. (See separate article, page 6).

In addition during the period 1985-90 I recorded about 150 migrants and wintering birds at the site including 30 or so "vagrants" which were only recorded a small number of times. These included nine duck species, greylag goose *Anser anser*, black stork *Ciconia nigra* and wintering eagles and harriers which preyed on the little grebe, coot and moorhen.

It was not only the birds which took advantage of the area's transformation. On 2 May 1988 a little tern hunting the settling lagoon brought a small fish to its mate on the embankment and passed it over in typical display. This was the first proof that there were fish in the main lagoon. Shortly afterwards shoals of tiny fish were found in the shallow waters well beyond the lagoon. Frogs also appeared and, mysteriously, freshwater turtles were seen from September 1988. One was 20 cm long! These additions to the local fauna meant that fish eating and predatory species were finding the lagoon more attractive. On 11 April 1990 an osprey *Pandion haliaetus* was seen feeding on a substantial prey which was not identified but may have been a turtle.

Foxes were also seen at the site and there was a fluctuating group of up to 20 feral dogs, which caused panic among the wintering birds. I was convinced they hunted birds in the reeds and assumed that they also preyed on the breeding birds and young. Other wildlife included explosions of blue-bodied dragonflies and small swarms of locusts which provided aerial feasts for the birds. There were also impressive passages, over several days, of migrant painted lady *Vanessa cardui* butterflies.

It is planned that treated effluent will be used to meet the irrigation requirements of the landscaped areas of the complete complex. The ultimate fate of this new wetland will therefore depend upon the amount of effluent which

continues to flow to it thereafter. It is to be hoped that a sufficient permanent surplus will be available to save it, thereby making some small recompense for the tremendous losses of coastal wetland to development along the Arabian Gulf in recent times.

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NEW BOOKS

The aim of this recent literature section is to give details of new books which are, in some way, relevant to the study of birds and wildlife in Arabia or to the Arabian/Middle Eastern environment generally. Most titles mentioned are available in good book shops in Arabia, Europe and North America. Others are on restricted distribution or privately published and readers wishing to obtain copies should contact the author, publisher or distributor mentioned. Alternatively all the titles reviewed in this issue and earlier *Phoenix* issues may be ordered through Subbuteo Natural History Books Ltd, Treuddyn, N Mold, Clwyd, CH7 4LN UK. Whenever ordering through a library or agent quote the ISBN or ISSN number if given. The prices shown here are published prices, which sometimes include post and packaging. Recommendations made about books are based on the standard of treatment of the subject, format and quality of preparation. A recommendation does not necessarily mean good value for money. Readers are asked to provide details of other new relevant titles not mentioned in this survey.

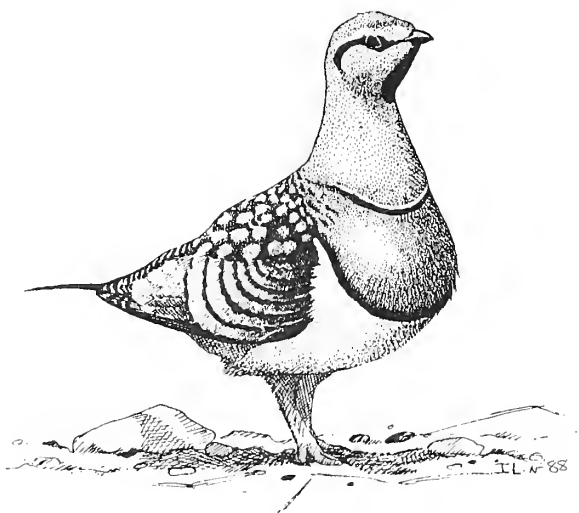


Fig 6. Pin-tailed sandgrouse *Pterocles alchata* was seen again in northern Saudi Arabia (KB34) in late February 1991 (G McMullan). It has bred in northern Arabia but no new records have come to light since the ABBA project started.

THE BIRDS OF PAKISTAN VOL 1; NON-PASSERIFORMS by T J Roberts, 1991

When it is complete, *The Birds of Pakistan* must rank with the greatest individual tours de force in the ornithological world in recent years. The author has an unrivalled 34 years experience in Pakistan and his

meticulous account of the birds of that country is illustrated by his own line drawings and colour plates. His book represents the first time that the avifauna of Pakistan has been covered; this first volume (of two) covers the 340 non-passerine species. Volume 2 will cover 320 passerines. Volume 1 is written in a refreshing, very readable, style and oozes the authority of an author who has made the birds of this diverse country his life's work. Introductory chapters of about 46 pages give much regional background and include separate essays on the zoogeographical influences of bird distribution in Pakistan, ecological zones and migration patterns. Bird habitats within Pakistan are enormously variable, ranging from tropical coastal mangroves to snow-covered Himalayas. Some of this diversity is illustrated by colour photographs. The avifauna is equally diverse having oriental, Himalayan and palearctic elements, the latter probably being the major influence. To deal with the ecological zones the author has divided the country into four main areas and 15 sub-zones, he lists typical birds and plant species to be found in each. One feels that the migration chapter could be developed into a book of its own right, in view of the enormously complex migration elements in this north west part of the Indian subcontinent. The author has categorised 10 types of migrants. Migrants come to Pakistan from the east and the west, there are summer visitors from the south and from Africa, winter visitors from the north, altitudinal migrants from the Himalayas. Not to mention the host of birds passing through Pakistan on their way to India each year from central Asia. Birds as pests and those seen as beneficial agents within the environment and the interactions of birds with man are covered in a separate chapter. Another part of the introduction is a long but intrinsically interesting account of early ornithologists active in that part of the world. The species accounts are detailed but do not include full descriptions of all plumages because of the author's, and publisher's considerations of space, but in any event these can be found in other recent works covering the Indian subcontinent. The format of the species accounts includes english names and alternatives, the scientific name (plus author), synonyms and sub-species where appropriate. Many species have a paragraph on taxonomy if this is needed. The description includes various measurements, identification points and comparison with other species including chicks and immatures. The section on 'habitat, distribution and status' for each species gives precise information of dates and places of records and 'habits' includes many personal notes and observations by the author. The paragraphs on 'breeding biology' draws heavily on the records and specimens of egg collectors active in that part of the world earlier this century and before and emphasise the dearth of up to date knowledge for many parts of modern Pakistan. 'Vocalisations' are also dealt with for each species and where appropriate miscellaneous notes are appended. Most species have a distribution map showing wintering and breeding status and either a line drawing or an illustration on one of the 23 colour plates (or both). In this first volume there are

76 black and white illustrations and text figures and 285 distribution maps. In Volume 1 appendices include a glossary (covering irrigation terms, vernacular words and technical ornithological references), a gazetteer showing the district and co-ordinates of places mentioned and a bibliography. Recommended.

Hard back, 662 pages (270 x 200 mm) price £40. Printed and published in Karachi by Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP. ISBN 0-19-577404-3.

***BUSTARDS, HEMIPODES AND SANDGROUSE, BIRDS OF DRY PLACES* by Paul A Johnsgard, 1991**

This volume is a companion of *Pheasants of the World* and *Quails, Partridges and Francolins of the World* by the same author. The choice of dealing with these three old world families under one cover seems rather odd as they have apparently little in common. The 'birds of dry places' grouping is rather tenuous, 'birds of wet places' would prove a tricky volume! The introduction gives a clue to this choice in that these families are fully represented in a large collection of unpublished bird plates painted by Major Henry Jones, held in the collection of the Zoological Society of London. These paintings also formed the illustrative material for the previous two volumes. The scope of this title seems to be fitted round the availability of the plates rather than for any strong taxonomic, evolutionary or habitat affinity. There are 64 pages of introductory chapters dealing with taxonomy, zoogeography, evolution, behaviour, breeding and exploitation and conservation. However as the three families are so diverse each introductory subject heading, quickly breaks down to separate treatment of each family. Altogether 51 species are covered, of which one hemipode, two bustards (and possibly a third) and six sandgrouse occur in Arabia. The species accounts make up the major part of the book. Keys are provided to the identification of each family. Individual species data includes vernacular names (often in several languages), distribution and a map showing, as appropriate, winter and breeding areas (39 maps in all), races, biometrics, description and identification. More lengthy paragraphs deal with general biology and ecology, social behaviour, reproductive biology, evolutionary relationships and status and conservation outlook. Coverage varies enormously from only about one and a half pages for the lark quail to eleven pages for the great bustard. All but one of the 51 colour plates, which are excellently reproduced, were illustrated by Major Henry Jones at the turn of the century. The format of these paintings gives the book an unfortunate antiquated feel (some may find this attractive) as the plates are so typical of good bird books of a century ago. The plates are, nevertheless attractive, particularly those of the hemipodes and sandgrouse. The bustard paintings are not quite so polished and look as though they were done in a bit of a hurry. (The Zoological Society of

London has some 1200 water colours painted by Major Jones which represents a production line by anyones standards!) There are 53 other text figures showing aspects of species anatomy, plumage, ecology and behaviour.

Hard back, 276 pages (275 x 215 mm), price £60. Published by Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP. ISBN 0-19-857678-6.

***THE CAMBRIDGE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF ORNITHOLOGY* Edited by Michael Brooke and Tim Birkhead, 1991**

This encyclopedia is a comprehensive reference source for all flavours of bird enthusiast. It contains contributions by three dozen experts and is arranged in 11 main chapters, covering such broad issues as avian anatomy, flight, migration, distribution, population, breeding and behaviour, amongst others. Each chapter subject is then broken down into manageable parts, for example with the breeding chapter includes separate sections on the timing of the breeding season, nests, eggs, incubation, hatching, the young bird, parental care, fledging period, imprinting, brood parasitism and other subjects. In turn these sub-headings are further divided up as appropriate for example "eggs" is treated in detail through laying behaviour, strength, shape, colour, size, number and brood numbers etc. In addition to the main chapters there are some 20 odd separate essays "special features", on subjects which deserve particular attention but do not necessarily fit easily into any of the other main chapters. Examples are radar tracking, tool using and eruptions. Appendices provide a list of ornithological organisations worldwide, a glossary of ornithological terms and indexes of scientific names, common names and subjects. This encyclopedia does not have the depth to stand alone as a specialist reference but it certainly has the breadth and authority to be of use and interest to anyone who is concerned with birds and makes exceptionally good browsing. Helpfully each chapter is backed up by lists of titles for further reading. A most attractive book illustrated with a couple of hundred exceptionally good colour photographs, printed to an extremely high standard. There is numerous other artwork, graphs, tables etc to illustrate and emphasise the text. This encyclopedia is a summary of all the good scientific ornithology in the last two or three decades. Recommended.

Hardback, 362 pages (277 x 260 mm), price £24.95. Published by Cambridge University Press, The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, CB2 1RP. ISBN 0521362052.

***THE MAMMALS OF ARABIA: (Second Edition)* by D L Harrison & P J Bates, 1991**

The birds of Arabia are now relatively well covered by up to date reference books, local guides and regional

field guides. For Arabian mammals this is the first complete reference since the first edition of *Mammals of Arabia* appeared in three volumes over the period 1964-72. The first edition was the definitive text until now. It had become increasingly scarce and was consequently expensive in recent years. The second edition is condensed into one volume and has been brought fully up to date. It will clearly remain the book of Arabian mammals for a generation at least. Since the first edition appeared, Arabia has undergone many changes, particularly the environment, with local overgrazing and deforestation on the one hand and the creation of new and wonderful habitats, through the provision of irrigation and agriculture, on the other. Not to mention the terrific urbanisation that has occurred. All these changes have had a knock-on effect for mammals - both positively and negatively. The Arab world is now much more environmentally aware than it was a generation ago and both species and habitats are now protected although much work still needs to be done. The study of chromosomes has enabled a greater understanding and accuracy in mammal taxonomy and the relationships between different taxa. Caryology is a new aspect of this reference. A number of species have been added to the list of Arabian mammals since the first edition, these include Macedonian mouse, lesser bandicoot rat and mouse-like hamster to name a few. The new edition includes an up to date revision of taxonomy. The geographical and zoological scope is the same, it includes all the wild terrestrial mammals occupying the region of the Arabian Peninsula, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Syria, Iraq and Sinai. Domestic, marine and extinct mammals are excluded. To condense the three volumes of the first edition into this one volume, lengthy tables of measurements of individual specimens have had to be summarised and technical descriptions, especially of races, have been reduced and are less formal. Introductory sections are minimal (a pity because many readers will not have seen the more extensive introductions in the first edition) and cover only material reviewed and definitions of measurements. The species accounts are preceded by a short note on the family and then a key to each family based on external features supplemented by dentition. For each species information is given under external characters, cranial characters, dentition, variation (i.e. colour morphs and races), distribution, with a map which also covers nearby areas such as Turkey, the southern part of the former USSR, Iran, Egypt, Sudan and parts of Abyssinia. A remarks paragraph covers habits, habitats, food and life history. The work is illustrated by many black and white photographs of habitats, skulls, specimens and mammals in life. There are many line drawings of mammals and their anatomy, a good number of which also appeared in the first edition, giving the book a very familiar feel. Altogether there are 449 text figures, (photos, maps, line drawings) and 147 data tables. This volume is finished off with a glossary of terms, gazetteer, bibliography and index of english and scientific names. Recommended.

Hardback, 354 pages (295 x 210 mm). Regular price £65 but special price of £60 to *Phoenix* readers (includes postage & packing worldwide). Published by Harrison Zoological Museum, Bowerwood House, St Botolph's Road, Sevenoaks, Kent, TN13 3AG, England. ISBN 0951731300.

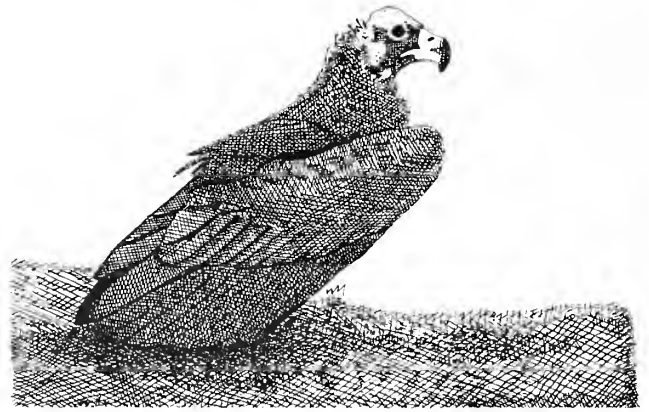


Fig 7. A black vulture *Aegypius monacha* was seen in the Jebel Tubaiq area (DA36) northern Saudi Arabia, 27 April 1992 (MCJ). This is a new area for the species and the date suggests it is a potential breeding species there.

DUGONGS: STATUS AND CONSERVATION IN THE ARABIAN REGION by A Preen, 1989

This publication is in two volumes and constitutes Technical Report no. 10, of the Coastal and Marine Management Series, of the Meteorological & Environmental Protection Agency (MEPA), Jeddah. This valuable report is the results of a two and a half year study in the Red Sea and Arabian Gulf of this widespread but little known marine mammal. The first volume provides details of taxonomy, feeding requirements, life history, predation, threats, survey methods and results. The survey included a very thorough search for dugong and involved exhaustive interviews with local fisherfolk as well as extensive aerial surveys. The results turned upside down our knowledge of the dugong in the Arabian region. From an earlier estimated population of, maybe, 50 in the Arabian Gulf and, possibly, 200 in the Red Sea, the survey turned in an estimated population of about 7,000 in the Arabian Gulf and 4000 in the Red Sea. One staggering observation included a single herd of dugongs containing 674 animals. However everything is not rosy for dugongkind, they are very susceptible to oil pollution, habitat destruction, dredging, land reclamation, drowning in fish nets, hunting for food and disturbance by recreating humans. Where have we heard all this before? Fortunately the dugong as the centre piece of the dinner table is becoming less and less fashionable in the Gulf and so a major pressure on the

population has been reduced. Volume 2, lists detailed conservation recommendations and sets timescales for re-introductions to areas where it has disappeared. Recommendations include the establishment of dugong protected areas, a ban on killing dugongs for food and the sale of its meat, oil spill contingency plans, habitat protection, public education and further research. The report is illustrated by 18 photos, 34 text figures and maps; 33 tables; 11 appendices.

Card covers; Volume 1 - 219 pages, Volume 2 - 47 pages (295 x 210 mm). This report is not for sale but it is available to institutions concerned with the conservation of natural resources. Published by the Meteorological and Environmental Protection Agency, PO Box 1358 Jeddah 21431, Saudi Arabia.

MARINE TURTLES THEIR STATUS AND CONSERVATION IN SAUDI ARABIA by J D Miller, 1989

Like the previous title this publication is another Technical Report (No 9) in the Coastal and Marine Management Series of MEPA, Jeddah and is presented in two volumes. Volume 1 includes the results of a two and a half year study of the green and hawksbill turtles in the Saudi Arabian parts of the Arabian Gulf and Red Sea. It covers turtle status, life histories, environments, survival problems for turtles, details of the study and results. Although both species are endangered on a worldwide basis they are quite abundant in the coastal waters of Saudi Arabia. A tagging programme, which involved no less than 60 volunteers, provided an enormous amount of information on the ecology of the study species. Volume 1 is complete with 52 tables, 24 colour photographs and 46 figures and maps. Volume 2 presents recommendations for the conservation of marine turtles in Saudi Arabia and adjacent waters. It covers in detail measures to protect and manage nesting beaches, the protection of feeding habitats, the elimination of commerce in turtle products and restrictions on egg collecting and the hunting of turtles for food. The elimination of predators (which include the house mouse which feeds on young turtles), reducing the effect of oil pollution and accumulated flotsam on beaches (which inhibits nesting) and the introduction of international co-operation are also dealt with. In view of the enormously long period which turtles take to mature to breeding age (from 30 to 50 years) any measures we take now to protect turtles may only be judged in terms of effectiveness by our grandchildren. The ecological requirements of turtles, especially their breeding needs, are extremely critical and seemingly insignificant factors such as the sighting of street lights, (lights at night disorientate young turtles which then fail to find the sea) and the correct control of vegetation and shade (the wrong ground temperatures inhibit breeding efficiency) must be got right for turtles to breed successfully. Volume 2 is complete with 7 tables and 5 text figures.

Card covers: Volume 1 - 228 pages, Volume 2 - 70 pages (295 x 210 mm). See previous title for availability.

PLANTS OF NORTHERN SAUDI ARABIA by H H Heemstra, H O al Hassan and F S al Minwer, 1990

Northern Saudi Arabia is a harsh environment with hot summers, cold winters and a mean annual rainfall of only about 60 mm. It is severely overgrazed and often windswept, consequently it has a rather impoverished flora. The authors have compiled this account of the plants of the al Jauf-Sakaka area of northern Saudi Arabia from their collections as well as literature sources. Just over 300 species are included, arranged in 44 families of which the *Compositae* number 51 species. The total is made up of 171 annual herbs, 78 perennial herbs, 41 dwarf shrubs, ten shrubs and two trees (acacia and tamarix). After a very short introduction, which is also in Arabic, the species accounts follow a short general description of the characteristics of each family. The species accounts provide a description of the plant and its various parts, mode of growth, habitat, commonality and an Arabic name. There is a list of references, a glossary and an index to the botanical and Arabic names. The book is illustrated by 5-600 coloured plates some of which are unfortunately rather poorly printed, others are photographs of herbarian specimens. However overall they provide a very useful field guide to many of the plants of this part of Arabia.

Hard back, 360 pages (242 x 170 mm). Price not known. Published by the Ministry of Agriculture and Water, Range and Animal Development Research Centre, PO Box 322, Sakaka, Al Jauf, Saudi Arabia, in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations.

THE GREEN GUIDE TO THE EMIRATES by Marjcke Jongbloed, 1991

This is an excellent introduction to what the UAE has to offer outdoors-minded people. It covers all the things that new arrivals in the UAE or those just new to the outdoors, need to know about the country to enable them to travel interestingly and safely. It offers many exciting ideas for weekend travel destinations in the Emirates. There is an introduction which covers general geology, archeology, vegetation etc but the main part of the book is devoted to trips to places of interest. Each trip account includes a sketch map of the route to be taken and interesting things to see en route, including geological, archeological, ethnographical, botanical and zoological. The book is well illustrated with about 130 photographs, some 300 or so line drawings of plants, animals, insects etc. and 10 sketch maps. The illustrations are grouped to cover subjects such as birds, fossils, plants, snakes, insects, trees, moths, butterflies, fungi and grasses. Such a small book can only ever give the broadest of

introduction to the variety and colour of wildlife in the UAE but it is successful in this objective. The book is written, photographed and illustrated by the author and is recommended to those who wants to get the best out of the United Arab Emirates.

Card covers, spiral bound, 96 pages (210 x 147 mm). Price 45 dhs. Published by Motivate Publishing, PO Box 2331, Dubai, UAE. Also available from Roger Lascelles, 47 York Road, Brentford, Middlesex, UK. ISBN 1-873544-22-7.

ISLAMIC PRINCIPLES FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT by A B A Ba Kader et al, 1989

Islam is a way of life that encompasses an overall view of the universe and the inter-relationship of life forms within it, especially of man and the environment. It combines belief, legislation and enforcement. This booklet has been prepared as a building block for environmental legislation in Islamic countries. It is a preliminary paper based on koranic principles aimed at motivating more specialised research, but it also seeks to define islamic concepts of the environment and the relationships of man to it, especially sustainable utilisation and the development of natural resources. Sections within the booklet cover Islam's attitude to nature and natural resources; protection of same; the protection of man and the environment from pollutants and rules of Islamic law which govern protection and conservation of the environment. The booklet is in English, French and Arabic.

Card cover, 78 pages (211 x 145 mm). Published by the Meteorological and Environmental Protection Agency, PO Box 1358 Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in conjunction with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, Gland, Switzerland (IUCN Environmental policy and law paper no. 20). ISBN 2-88032-088-7.

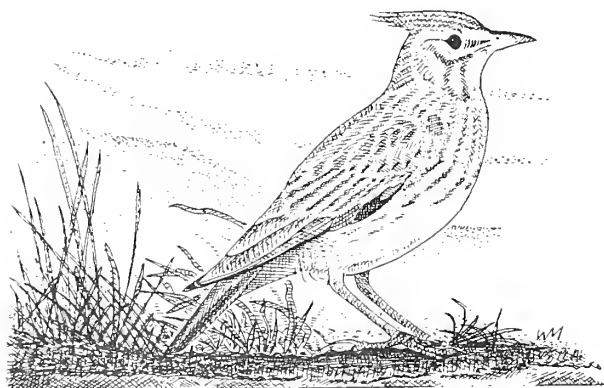


Fig 8. At least seven pairs of crested larks *Galerida cristata* were observed with fledglings on Karan Island (PB32) and were also present Jana Island (PB31), Arabian Gulf, May and June 1991. (M I Evans and others).

NEW ARABIC BOOKS

NATURAL HISTORY OF SAUDI ARABIA, AN INTRODUCTION, 1992

If one considers that Saudi Arabia takes up about three quarters of the Arabian Peninsula (more than two million square kilometres), this book probably represents the first book in Arabic that brings together all natural history subjects for Arabia. It is certainly the first title aiming to be a general introduction to natural history in Saudi Arabia. Its scope includes plants, animals, geology, climate, soil, habitats, national parks, marine life and animal and plant husbandry. In its early chapters the book treats the major regions of Saudi Arabia in some detail. There are also more general chapters on desert environments and plant adaptations. Special features occur throughout the book on, for example, the Harrats, grazing rangelands, acacia and salvadora plant communities and truffles and mushrooms. National parks, fruits and crops, especially dates, get a special mention as do the Arabian horse and camel. Separate chapters deal with the marine environments of the Arabian Gulf and Red Sea, with additional sections on pearling and fish farming. Each main group of vertebrates is treated separately and there are also sections on invertebrates. It is illustrated throughout by colour photographs of which there must be at least 600. This book will be of great interest to all Arabic speakers who have a general interest in wildlife and are concerned with the environment who have, until now, been deprived of a handy reference. It will also sit well on the shelves of public libraries school and colleges. The book is translated into english throughout, which reads from back to front.

Hard back, 312 pages, (315 x 230 mm). Price not known. Published by the Ministry of Agriculture & Water, the National Agriculture and Water Research Centre, PO Box 17285, Riyadh 11484, Saudi Arabia.

JOURNALS REPORTS & OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Most international ornithological publications give periodic listings of recent literature including papers concerning birds in Arabia. The Ornithological Society of the Middle East prepares a periodic roundup of all publications for the Middle East area. However publications of the various natural history and bird groups in Arabia and official conservation organisations do not always get reviewed. The aim of this note is to list some of the more interesting papers concerning birds and other wildlife which have appeared in local natural history newsletters and reports etc in Arabia in recent months. Space does not permit the full citation of each article but further information can be obtained from the various societies and organisations shown. Note that in addition to the papers listed regular features such as recent reports, brief notes etc appear in virtually all the newsletters quoted.

New Journal: *Emirates Bird Report*

The *Emirates Bird Report*, conscientiously and comprehensively compiled by Colin Richardson, has been around for a few years now, in one form or another. It started life in 1987 as the Dubai bird report, included in *Gazelle* the Dubai Natural History Group Newsletter, and covered mainly the Dubai area of the UAE. At that time it comprised observations over a three month period. It published records from all over the UAE from subsequent early editions, and from No 7 (1989) it became the *Emirates Bird Report* and provided a platform to record bird observations throughout the country. As there is no specific ornithological club that encompasses the whole of the UAE it formed a natural focus for ornithological recording. The EBR has now moved two steps forward through the creation of the Emirates Bird Records Committee and the tapping of funding from the restructured Emirates Natural History Group, based in Abu Dhabi. The extra money has enabled the preparation of a report to a much higher standard in an A5 size booklet style. The first issue in the new style, No. 15, (1992) is comprised of 44 pages and includes several ornithological articles in addition to the staple 'UAE Bird Report' (covering January to June 1991). Articles deal with the Asian winter waterfowl census; wildlife rescue efforts in Jubail, Saudi Arabia following the oil pollution of the northern Gulf in early 1991; new UAE breeding records; black drongos; Indian pond herons and various site and habitat notes. The second issue (No 16) in the new style appeared in August 1992, its 34 pages include the UAE Bird Report July-December 1991, and articles on bar-tailed desert larks, mourning wheatear identification, ringing recoveries and several short notes. Both issues are illustrated throughout with line drawings, mainly by Bill Morton. Colin has set a very high standard with this new style newsletter and its appearance is welcomed. Available from Colin Richardson, PO Box 2825, Dubai, UAE, price 20 Dhs.

The Fauna of Saudi Arabia; Vol 12 (1991) and cumulative index to Vols 1-10

Volume 12 of this continuing series contains 20 papers, filling 440 pages. The major article (168 pages) in this issue is a definitive work on the corals and coral communities of Arabia. It is the results of some 500 surveys of sites in the Red Sea, Arabian Gulf and Arabian Sea. It reviews the taxonomy of this complex branch of the animal kingdom and brings order to the hitherto confusion surrounding this group of animals. Altogether 220 species are dealt with, including one described as new to science. The article is illustrated by 116 colour plates and over 200 black and white photos, making it an extremely valuable field guide to Arabian corals.

Of the remaining papers in Volume 12 six concern vertebrates; one describes a new genus and species of congrid eel from the Gulf of Aden, another the first record of the marbled polecat in Arabia and

distributional studies on the Indian crested porcupine and Brandts hedgehog. Price S Fr 159. ISBN 3-7234-00124.

The index to Volumes 1-10 is an extremely useful research tool, it lists in 200 pages, some 15,000 references to taxa mentioned in the first ten volumes. There is a separate listing of the no less than 789 taxa described as new to science (almost all invertebrates) and a list of all of the authors contributing. Price S Fr 97. ISBN 3-723400116.

Both Vol 12 and the Index are published by NCWCD Riyadh and are available from Karger Libri AG, Petersgraben 31, CH-4009, Basel, Switzerland.

Oman Bird News Nos. 11 (Winter 1991) & 12 (Summer 1992)

No 11 is a 16 page issue and includes notes on the birds of the Musandam peninsula, Bahrain, Masirah and recent reports. No 12 has a mass of interesting notes including endemic tubenoses of the Arabian Sea, terrestrial birds from the Barr al Hikman area, ABBA Survey 11 in Oman, Dhofar migration study and two articles on Masirah's birds. Available from the Oman Bird Group, Natural History Museum, PO Box 668, Muscat, Oman.

Sandgrouse 13(2) 1991

This issue includes an important article on the breeding biology of desert finch and the birds of the eastern Rub al khali, Saudi Arabia. Shorter notes include, among others, a re-assessment of the Masirah Island (Oman), Radde's accentor *Prunella ocularis*. Per Alstrom has reidentified it as a black-throated accentor *P. atrogularis*. Erik Hirschfeld contributes notes on the first records of long-toed stint and paddyfield warbler for Bahrain. *OSME Bulletin* No 28 (1992) includes a preliminary report on a study of raptor migration through the western Arabian highlands. Available from OSME, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, England.

Zoology in the Middle East: Volume 5 (1991) & 6 (1992)

Vol 5 (118 pages) contains eight articles, which include wintering Dalmatian pelicans in Turkey and the migration of grey plover in Bulgaria (the latter in German). Other papers cover bottle nosed dolphins in the Aegean and Marmara Seas, two papers on reptiles in Jordan and three on invertebrates.

Vol 6 (126 pages) has 14 papers, six on vertebrates including three on birds; summer birds in Syria, movements of greater flamingo ringed in Iran and the biometrics of birds ringed in Turkey. Also included is an interesting paper on whale and dolphin sightings in the

Wildlife in Bahrain Volume 5 (1990)

The Bahrain Natural History Society has prepared this fifth edition of their journal, which has appeared in more or less alternate years since 1978. This issue covers a wide spectrum of interests concerning the flora and fauna of Bahrain, including a checklist of benthic marine algae, butterflies, new records of mammals, a flora checklist, water resources and the al Areen wildlife park collection. There is also a lengthy bird report for Bahrain for the years 1985 - 1988. This latest edition is larger at 275 x 210 mm (76 pages) than earlier editions which were A5 size. It is very well illustrated with line drawings by Barry Phillips and Ian Lewington. Available from Bahrain Natural History Society, PO Box 20336, Bahrain.

Tribulus

The second issue (Vol 1:2) of this new Bulletin of the Emirates Natural History Group appeared in October 1991. It keeps up the standard of the first issue, including colour photos on front and back covers, eight inside and a wide range of articles. The most interesting articles are a new UAE birds checklist and more information on crab plovers breeding on Abu al Abyad island. Other main articles cover weather in the UAE, archeology at Julfar, Gordon's wildcat, a plant survey at Mahdah and an Arabic article on the Ottoman mosque at Bidiya. Vol 2:1 appeared in April 1992. It contained six main articles, birds recorded at Al Ain Zoo, butterflies in the UAE, the milkweeds of the UAE, botulism in waterfowl, fossil sea urchins and archeology at Tell Abraq. Shorter notes dealt with long-legged buzzard nesting, sooty gulls, extinct birds, arabic bird names and bird reports. Available from Emirates Natural History Group, PO Box 2380, Abu Dhabi, UAE.

NCWCD/NWRC Reports

The National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development (Riyadh) and the National Wildlife Research Centre (Taif) have published a number of reports in the last year, several of which are of particular interest to bird conservation in the Middle East. These reports have included the *New Records of Bald Ibis Geronticus eremita in Saudi Arabia* (Schultz H & M 1991) - 24 recorded in four groups (up to 15 together) in 1991; *Lappet-faced Vultures in Mahazat as Sayd reserve* (Weigeldt & Schultz 1991) - minimum of 69 seen during a transect and *Demoiselle crane survey 1992* (Symens et al, 1992) - some 4000 cranes were recorded during the course of a ten day survey in March.

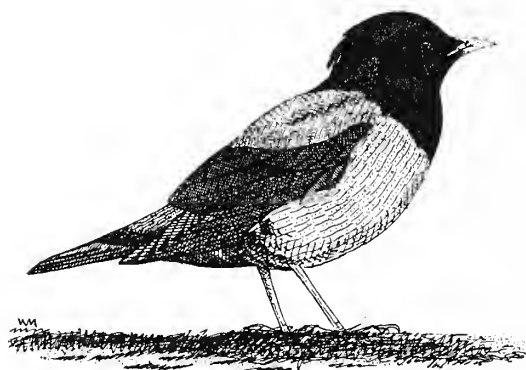


Fig 9. Eight rose-coloured starlings *Sturnus roseus* were at Digdaga (VB28), Ras al Khaimah, UAE, including one in song, 2 March 1992. (R Morris & M C J). Could they breed?

Bahrain wader study 1991 (E Hirschfeld et al 1992)

Records details of 456 waders ringed, as well as high tide counts, during 4 weeks, September - October 1991. Available from WIWO c/o Dutch Society for Protection of Birds, Driebergseweg 16C, 3708 JB, Zeist, The Netherlands. (Price DFL 10).

SOCIETY NEWS

Ornithological Society of Yemen

Unfortunately this Society has had a rather chequered history in recent years, because of shortage of active birders and others willing to work for the group. The contact for OSY is currently Derek Harvey of the Joint Oil Companies, Medical Clinic, PO Box 19751, Sanaa, Yemen. (Telephone 216723/417982). Derek is trying to get the group back onto an organised footing and would like to make contact with those resident in Yemen who are interested in birds as well as visiting birders.

SOCOTRAN BIRDS

Over the period March to May 1993 the Ornithological Society of the Middle East plans to mount a major survey to study birds, their habitats and conservation in southern and eastern Yemen, i.e. the part of the country which was the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. During the survey it is hoped that a small party can travel to the island of Socotra to study bird life there, for the first time in over 30 years. As very little information is available on the birds of the island it is thought timely to produce a short note of some of the ornithological goodies that the survey team might find on Socotra.

The island of Socotra lies some 200 kms off the Horn of Africa, about 400 kms from the Arabian mainland. It measures approximately 136 kms, east to west and 40 kms

at its widest, north to south. The island and outlying Abd el Kuri (32 x 5 kms) and other islets are largely composed of granite and limestone, rising to a maximum height of just over 1500 m. There are extensive plains on the northern side of the island where there are some date groves and primitive agriculture. It is arid with sparse scrub vegetation although there are some small perennial watercourses. Its fauna and flora is enigmatic with a curious mixture of African species and some palearctic and oriental influences. Its birds are generally comparable with those found in similar habitats in the south west corner of Arabia and the Horn of Africa, but the island has four endemic species of its own and perhaps as many as 11 endemic sub-species. Geographically, geologically and probably faunistically the island is best treated with Africa. However by virtue of the island being a dependency of the one time Sultanate of Qishn (the part of southern Yemen close to Oman) it is now part of the Republic of Yemen, and thus falls within the scope of the ABBA project.

The four endemic species that occur on Socotra are the Socotra warbler *Incaua incana*, the Socotra sunbird *Nectarinia balfouri*, the Socotra grackle *Onychognathus frater* and the Socotra bunting *Eumyza socotrana*. All are very poorly known especially in respect of their breeding behaviour and habitat needs.

The most recent, accessible, study of Socotran birds is that by Ripley & Bond (1966); the Birds of Socotra and Abd el Kuri, *Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections* Vol 151 No 7, from which this note draws. (The report of a later study in the 1980's organised by Dr Wranik and Aden University has unfortunately not been obtained for study).

It might be expected that the island's close proximity to Africa would mean it might have a whole range of African species not found in Arabia but this is generally not the case. One prominent African species occurring on Socotra that is not found in Arabia is the Blyth's or brown-winged grackle *Onychognathus blythii*, another is the Socotran race of African rufous sparrow *Passer motitensis* (considered by some to be an endemic species). However the avifauna contains a number of real puzzles which the very limited ornithological studies of the island to date have failed to resolve. For example a buzzard is reported nesting on the island which is supposed to resemble the common buzzard *Buteo buteo*. Snow, 1978; *Atlas of speciation in African non-passerine birds*, lumps these buzzards with the mountain buzzard *Buteo tachardus* species group of Africa, but comments "it certainly represents an undescribed race". A scops owl occurs, possibly the African scops owl *Otus senegalensis*, although the few that have been collected appear to be a new race. This bird would certainly deserve close attention as would the *strix* owl that was heard calling during the 1898-9 British & Liverpool museums expedition to Socotra. The call was said to closely resemble the tawny owl *S. aluco*. Hume's owl *S. butleri* seems the best possibility for this arid, rugged island. An

endemic race of the Nubian nightjar *Caprimulgus nubicus* has also been described. In view of the difficulties surrounding the identification and taxonomy of nightjars this is another bird that would certainly deserve close attention. Berlioz' swift *Apus berliozii* breeds on the island and possibly also in coastal areas of southern Arabia and Jouanin's petrel *Bulweria fallax* is said to occur regularly offshore. Is Socotra the undiscovered breeding site for this Arabian Seas endemic? Of more common stock Socotra boasts its own race of the Arabian superbird the golden-winged grosbeak *Rhychostruthus socotranus*, as well as breeding fan-tailed warblers *Cisticola juncidis* and cream-coloured coursers *Cursorius cursor*.

All in all, the OSME survey is going to have plenty of work to do if it gets to Socotra.

DESERT FINCH MOVES INTO CENTRAL ARABIA

Prior to the last two or three years the desert finch *Rhodospiza obsoleta* was restricted within Arabia to a very few localities including Tabuk and Tayma in the extreme north east of Saudi Arabia. Even then it was rather illusive and not even recorded every year. However since 1990 it has started turning up in areas far away from its northwest Arabian homeland. There are now records from Harrah FA38 (J A Norton), Sakaka (MCJ), the Hail area and KB34 near Hafar al Batin (R J Seargent). In the Hail area in March 1992 they were found to be widespread in small numbers. Males were singing and nest building was suspected. (O.Llwellyn). But most surprisingly are the number of records from the last three winters in the Riyadh area of central Arabia. They have now bred there and have been seen as late as May (D James et al). It would seem that this bird is utilising new habitats created by the vast expansion of agriculture and irrigation projects in Arabia. There would now seem to be no reason why it should not spread throughout central Arabia, to all the farm areas, as well as into the Eastern Province and it may, in time, even get to the United Arab Emirates where similar habitat exists. Its certainly a bird to start looking for all over the Arabian Peninsula.

If this species is in the process of a dynamic range expansion within Arabia it is most important that a log of its occurrence in new areas should be maintained and its breeding history recorded. All records of this species would be gratefully received by the ABBA project.

AUTUMN RAPTOR MIGRATION ALONG THE AL HADA ESCARPMENT NEAR TAIF, SAUDI ARABIA

At the invitation of the National Wildlife Research Centre, Taif, we spent three weeks in October 1991 researching the migration of raptors along the al Hada escarpment, near Taif, western Saudi Arabia. Casual counts made by NWRC staff in 1988 and 1990 had suggested that

significant numbers of raptors follow the Asir-Hedjaz escarpment each autumn and that the northern end of the escarpment at al Hada might be a suitable point from which to count.

During the period 13-28 October we counted for a total of 250 man-hours, predominantly from the NWRC house at the northern end of the escarpment (21°22'N, 40°15'E; GA19) which seemed to be the best vantage point. We also spent some time at sites a little to the south, - north of Harathi (21°N, 40°17'E) and at ash Shafa (21°06'N, 40°17'E). A total of 25,330 migrant raptors of 18 species was recorded. The most numerous were steppe buzzard *Buteo buteo vulpinus* (22,495) and steppe eagle *Aquila nipalensis* (2,001).

The count of steppe buzzard is the third highest in the Middle East in autumn and tends to suggest that they migrate on a very narrow front. The other significant counts are, to the north, 205,000 from the eastern end of the Black Sea and, to the south, 98,339 crossing the Bab-el-Mandeb straits into Africa.

By contrast the count of steppe eagle was much lower than we expected suggesting that this species migrates on a much broader front. This idea is supported by the many records of scattered small parties of eagles from open desert and other habitats throughout virtually the whole of the Arabian Peninsula. It is likely that steppe eagles only become concentrated as they near the Bab-el-Mandeb.

Fuller details of these observations are contained in *OSME Bulletin* 28:5-10.

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DEAD SEA SPARROWS FIND ARABIA

It was a mystery that the Dead Sea sparrow *Passer moabiticus* had never been recorded anywhere within the Arabian Peninsula, especially as it appears the majority leave their breeding areas in winter. Arabia seemed well within its theoretical wintering zone and astride its, supposed, migration route. It is also possible that the species might become a breeding bird in Arabia. The Dead Sea sparrow was recorded in Arabia during 1991 at three, quite separate, localities. The first occurrence was a flock in November near Jubail, (PB30) in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. In December some were seen on Bahrain (they stayed some weeks) and a small group appeared on Das island in the United Arab Emirates during January and stayed until early April.

Why they should suddenly occur at three places during 1991/2 is a mystery. Has everyone overlooked them in previous years or was this a phenomenon which will not be repeated in future years? This sparrow can easily be overlooked, especially as many birders seem to have an aversion to raising their binoculars to look at something as

common as a sparrow. However now the Dead Sea sparrow has been proven to occur, a lot more people will be paying more attention to the homely sparrow.

USE OF PEBBLES BY BLACKSTARTS IN NEST CONSTRUCTION

In Volume 4 of *The Birds of Africa* (Keith, et al, 1992) it says of the blackstart *Cercomela melanura* that rock-hole nests may have a perimeter or platform of pebbles and quotes Mackworth-Praed and Grant 1960; but records this has not been noted by other authors. As the use of pebbles in nest construction by blackstarts appears unusual it is worthwhile to record the following observation from near Khamis Mushait in the Asir Province of Saudi Arabia, which supports the Mackworth-Praed and Grant observation.

In May 1992 I received a phone call from my transport supervisor, who told me that a pair of dark grey birds had built a nest in the exhaust pipe of a "Bluebird" bus, that was off the road awaiting a spare. What intrigued him was that the birds were carrying granite chippings into the exhaust and building a wall in front of the nest. From his description of the birds I presumed them to be blackstart a species common in the area. I assumed the wall-building was perhaps a regular feature of nest defence behaviour, when building in holes or crevices that might be infiltrated by potential predators such as snakes or lizards. However, I could find no reference to such behaviour until I received *The Birds of Africa* Vol 4 during leave in the late summer.

Fortunately for the birds the replacement component required to put the bus back into commission took a long time to acquire and in consequence the pair were left undisturbed to raise their brood. When the young flew I photographed the nest site, removed the materials that made up the wall and put the following data on record:

- The nest was located about 25 cm inside a 20 cm diameter vehicle exhaust pipe, 52 cm from the ground.
- The wall comprised 68 flattish granite chippings. Their combined weight was 262 grms and the largest chipping measured 25 mm x 5 mm. The wall was approximately 6 cm high.

Arthur J. Stagg, PO Box 34, Khamis Mushait, Saudi Arabia.

NESTS OF GOLDEN-WINGED GROSBEAK IN OMAN

Although the distinctive golden-winged grosbeak *Rhynchostruthus socotranus* is common in some parts of its circumscribed range (Archer & Godman, 1961, *The Birds of British Somaliland and the Gulf of Aden* Vol 4; Ripley & Bond, 1966, *Smithsonian. Misc. Coll.* 151(7); Brooks et al, 1987, *Sandgrouse* 9:4-66), it has never been found nesting (*Continued on page 30*)

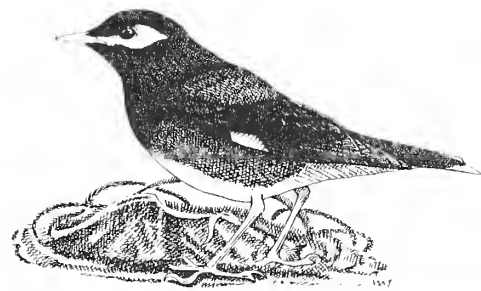
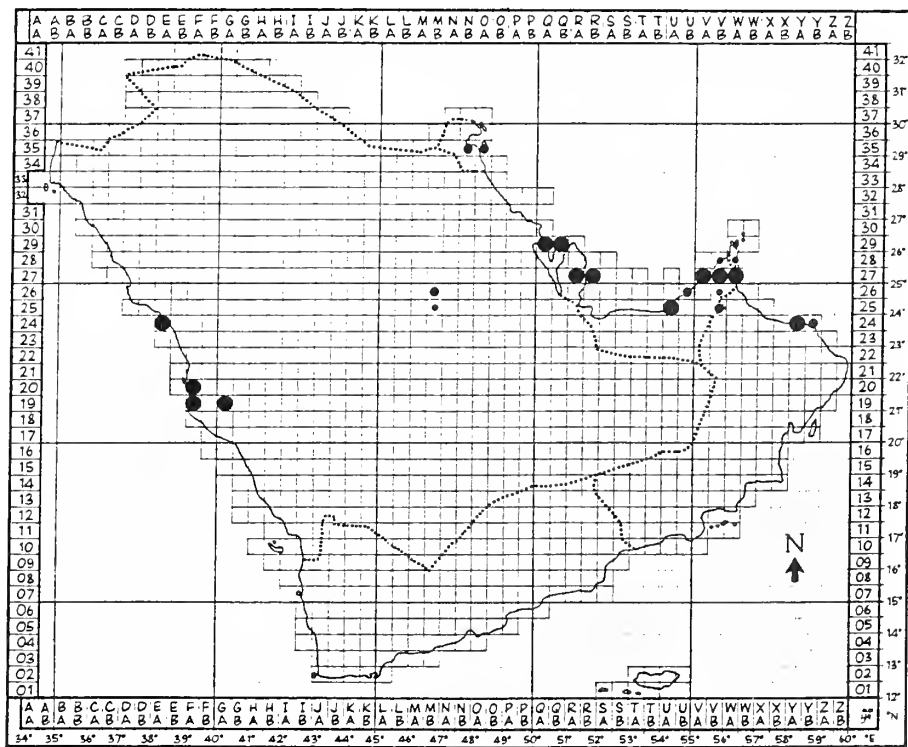
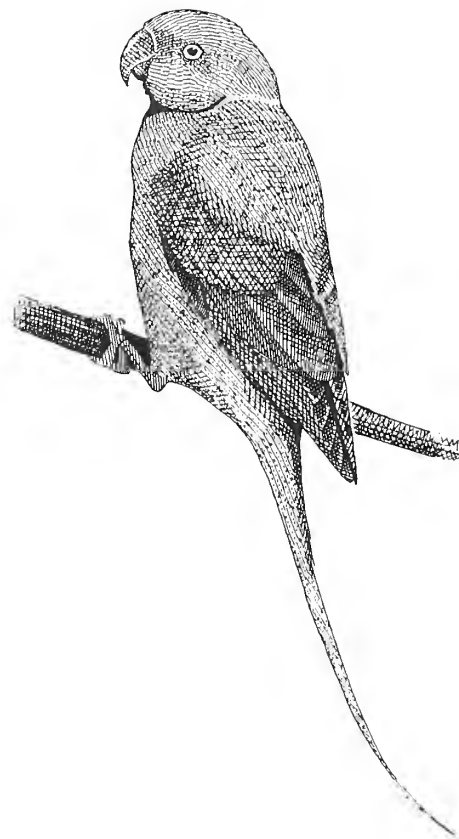
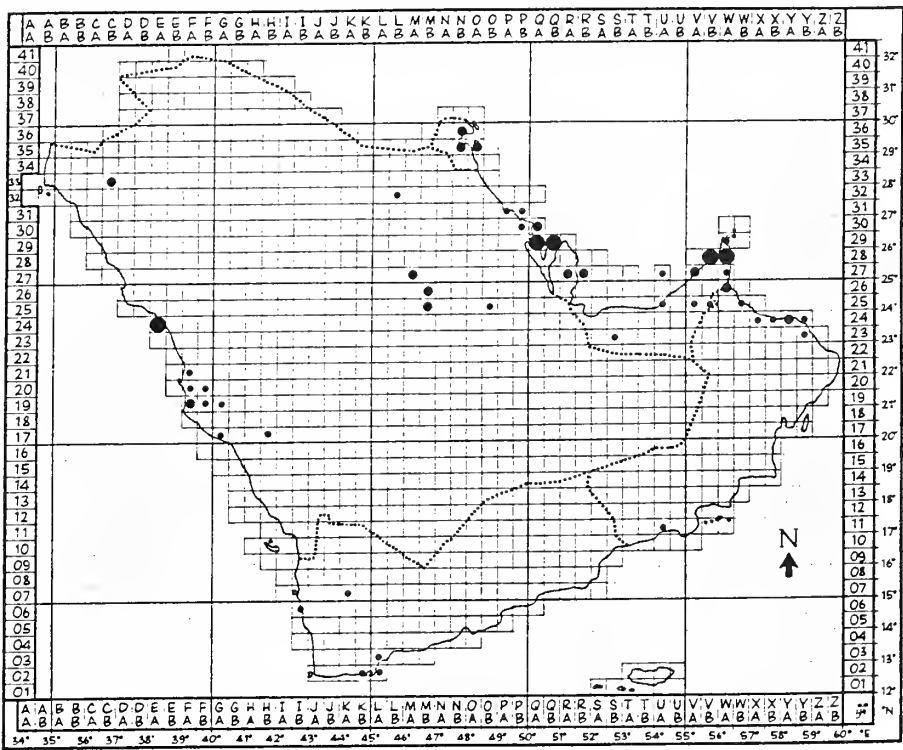


Fig 10 and 11. The rose-ringed parakeet *Psittacula krameri* and the common mynah *Acridotheres tristis* are probably the most successful and widespread exotic breeding species in Arabia.

(Gallagher & Woodcock, 1980, *The Birds of Oman*; Martins, 1987, *Sandgrouse* 9:106-110; see also Gallagher & Rogers, 1980; *J. Oman. Stud. Spec. Rep.* 2:381). Eggs have still to be described, but this note reports two nests recently discovered in Wadi Hina, Dhofar (south Oman).

Wadi Hina is a steeply-declining valley with a small, permanent spring, about 50 km east of Salalah. It is 2 km inland on the seaward-facing slopes of the Jebel Samhan range, and small pools formed in the spring (200 m altitude) are popular picnic sites. There is luxuriant tree growth in the valley bottom, and the wadi is well known for its many baobabs *Adansonia digitata*. A few golden-winged grosbeaks can generally be seen there, although euphorbias (with which the species is associated elsewhere) are not much in evidence.

M Brown, H Eriksen, J Eriksen, K Fry and I studied grosbeaks there for several hours on 17, 18 and 19 April 1991. The birds fed only on *Commiphora habessinica* fruits in leafless trees. A bird seized a berry in its bill, sometimes contorting itself parrot-like and hanging upside-down. Then it mandibulated it for a second so that pulp squeezed out at the sides, and vigorously shook its head like a dog two or three times, bits of pulp falling to the ground. Vocal activity was as described by Martins, 1987; *Sandgrouse* 9:106-110; we rendered the voice as 'pee-cher-tui' or 'pic-air tchui', 'suti cheee tua' and 'we-sue dli eedli wer chup', the last a 1.5 second-duration mixture of tinkling, fluty and twanging notes, similar to the goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*. In the morning of 17 April a pair of grosbeaks made 30 visits in 150 minutes to a nest that they were rapidly building in the crown of a *Delonix elata* tree about 8 m tall. A steep adjacent hillside and a x60 telescope gave excellent level views of birds at and on the nest, but leaves partly obscured the nest itself. Nonetheless it was clear that the nest was in the form of an untidy, loosely-built platform with only a shallow depression in the middle. It was composed of thin grey twigs and contained no fresh green material. A bird brought one twig at a time, about 4-6 cm long and up to 1 mm in diameter, or sometimes carried a beakful of even thinner, dry-looking twigs, torn from another *D. elata* tree. Some nest material was removed from an old nest of Ruppell's weaver *Ploceus galbula* of which there was a colony nearby. Grosbeaks were also seen to bring white objects about 5 mm long, perhaps catkins or cocoons, and at least seven such objects were built into the nest. A bird worked a twig into the fabric by placing it, probing, leaning over the edge, and shuffling down with wrists

Continued on page 30

slightly ajar or one or both wings half spread, shaking the body as if settling onto eggs. Building continued on 18 April but only a few building visits were made on 19 April.

In late March 1992 a nest was found by I J A Brown 200 m from the 1991 site. A bird was sitting on it and appeared to be incubating eggs. In company with M D Gallagher and J S Ash, I was shown the nest on 17 April 1992. It was sited near the top of a 4 m high, cut-about, leaning *Anogeissus dhofarica* tree on a wooded slope. No birds were around

and the nest seemed to be abandoned. One of us (MDG) therefore collected it, and it was deposited in the Oman Natural History Museum, Muscat. It was an open cup coarsely woven of fine twigs 0.5-1.5 mm (most about 1.0 mm) in diameter. The nest was 90 mm x 100 mm across and up to 70 mm in depth, with a cup diameter of 50 mm and depth of 40 mm. It was lined with much finer grasses or grass-like fibres. The fabric of the nest contained 12 4-mm spherical whitish cocoons, one 8 x 12 mm flat yellowish cocoon in the rim of the cup, and a dipteran pupal case about 5 mm long. The floor of the cup contained trodden-in faeces.

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THE ABBA BREEDING EVIDENCE CODE

The Breeding Evidence Codes used by ABBA and the definition of each category of breeding probability are shown below. This code generally agrees with the B.E.C. developed by the European Ornithological Atlas Committee, which has been taken up by numerous other ornithological atlas projects worldwide. Note that the ABBA 18 point B.E.C. translates on computer generated maps as a ten point code (0-9). The relevant computer map code is shown in brackets against each B.E.C. below. On the hand produced maps, the largest dot represents confirmed breeding (BECs 10-16), the middle sized dot denotes probable breeding (BECs 3-9) and the smallest dot represents 'other records', that is presence and possible breeding codes (XX-2).

Codes denoting presence only

- XX Highly sedentary species observed at any time. (Computer maps=1)
- O Species observed in the breeding season. (Computer maps=2)

Codes denoting possible breeding

- 1 Species observed in breeding season in possible nesting habitat. (Computer maps=3)
- 2 Singing male(s) present (or breeding calls heard) in the breeding season. (Computer maps=3)

Codes denoting probable breeding

- 3 Pair observed in suitable nesting habitat in breeding season. (Computer maps=4)
- 4 Permanent territory presumed through registration of territorial behaviour (song, etc) on at least two

different days, a week or more apart, at the same place. (Computer maps=4)

- 5 Display and courtship. (Computer maps=4)
- 6 Visiting probable nest-site. (Computer maps=5)
- 7 Agitated behaviour or anxiety calls from adult(s). (Computer maps=5)
- 8 Brood patch on adult examined in the hand, indicating probably incubating. (Computer maps=6)
- 9 Building nest or excavating nest-hole. (Computer maps=6)

RECORDS WANTED

Readers who have records of Arabian birds, however old, and whether published or not, who have not yet received the ABBA "Instructions to Contributors" and a set of Atlas report forms, are urged to make contact with the Co-ordinator. Old records are especially valuable in assessing population changes and range expansions and contractions. Although the project concerns resident and breeding species, it is not only proved breeding information that is required, information on behaviour suggesting possible or probable breeding is very valuable. Information on exotics and escaped species, ringed birds and habitats is also needed.

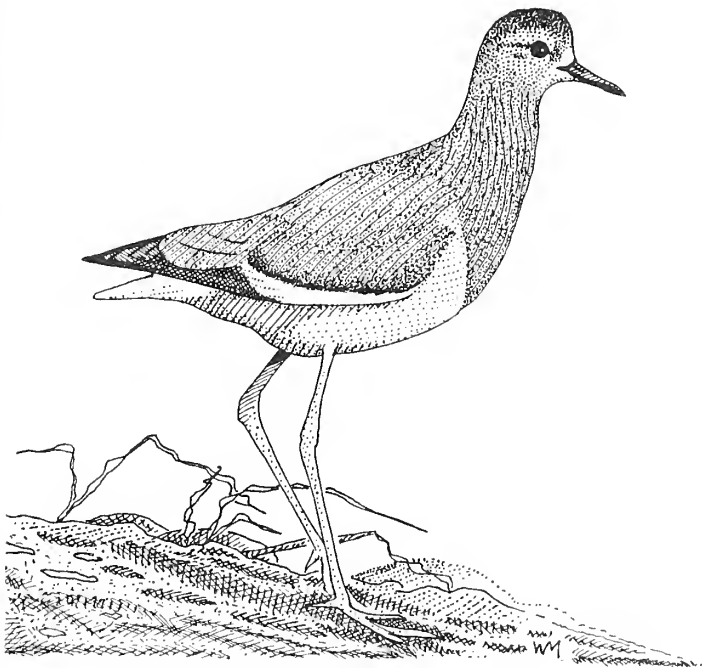


Fig 12. White-tailed plovers *Chettusia leucura* bred for the first time in Arabia in 1992. (See page 3)

Codes denoting confirmed breeding

- 10 Distraction display or injury feigning. (Computer maps=7)
- 11 Used nest or egg shell found. (Computer maps=7)
- 12 Recently fledged young (nidicolous species) or downy young (nidifugous species). (Computer maps=7)
- 13 Adult(s) entering or leaving nest site in circumstances indicating occupied nest (including high nests or nest-holes, the contents of which cannot be seen) or adult(s) seen sitting on the nest. (Computer maps=7)
- 14 Adult(s) carrying food for young or faecal sac. (Computer maps=7)
- 15 Nest containing eggs. (Computer maps=8)
- 16 Nest with young seen or heard. (Computer maps=9)

PHOTOS NEEDED FOR PHOENIX

Photos of habitats, Arabian breeding birds, nests and eggs etc are welcome for inclusion in future issues of Phoenix. Photos may be printed with just a caption, for their aesthetic value, or can be submitted to illustrate notes and papers. Photos may be colour or black and white (glossy or matt) slides, prints or negatives so long as they have good contrast.

HOW TO OBTAIN PHOENIX

One issue of the *Phoenix* is published each year. It is issued free to all current contributors to the ABBA project and is also sent to recent correspondents. A bundle of each issue is also passed to all natural history and similar groups active in Arabia. It is available on subscription for a single payment of £15 (\$30) for the next five issues, i.e Nos 10 to 14 inclusive. (All subscribers will receive a reminder when their next subscription is due). *Phoenix* Nos 1 - 8 are available at £2 each (or the set for £10 plus £2 postage). Those leaving Arabia might be interested in placing a subscription order as the price represents a small sum for all the news of Arabian birds for five years. Will subscribers and observers please remember to advise any change of address.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

The next Annual General Meeting of the Ornithological Society of the Middle East will be held on Saturday 17 July 1993. The 1994 AGM will take place on 9 July. Details of venues to be announced.

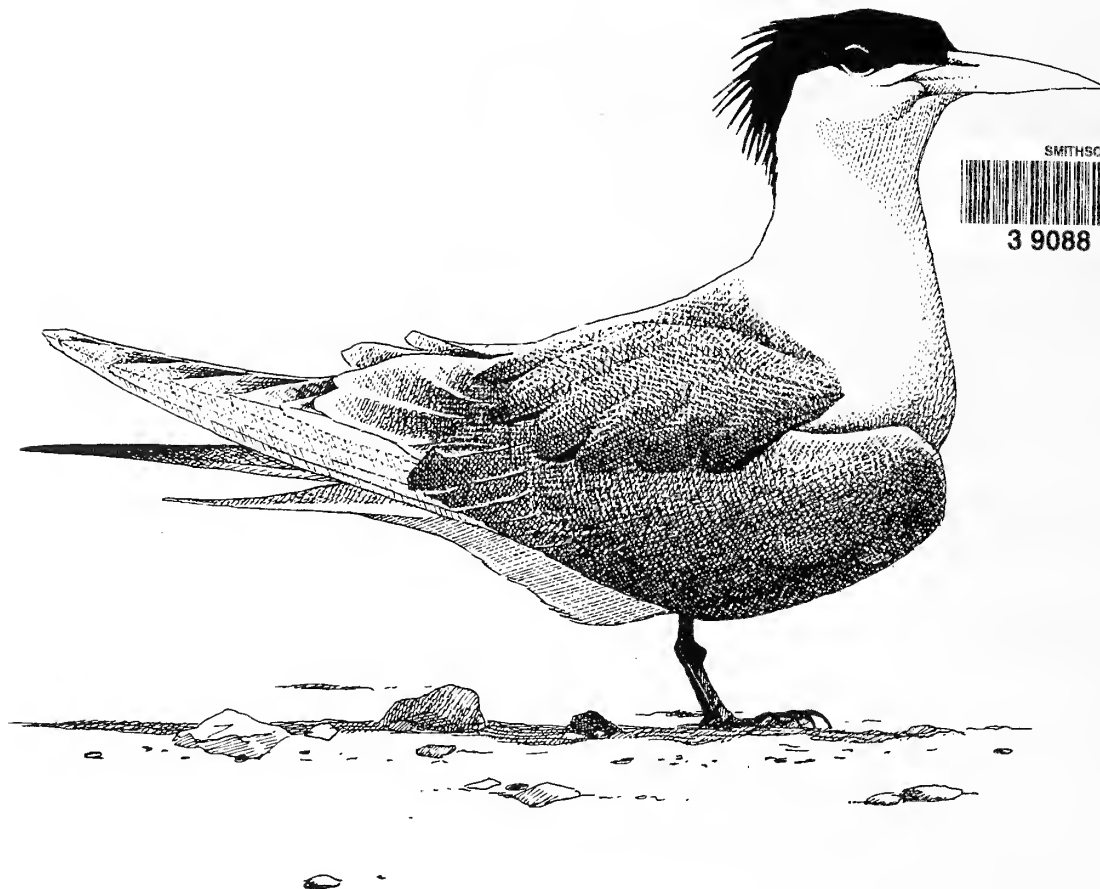


Fig 13. Lesser-crested terns *Sterna bengalensis* are one of the most numerous breeding seabirds around Arabia

CONTRIBUTIONS TO PHOENIX

Short articles relevant to the aims of the ABBA project are welcomed, especially notes on new breeding birds, the avifauna of specific areas or studies concerning particular species. Notices, requests for information and advertisements of reports etc are inserted in *Phoenix* free of charge. Submissions need not necessarily be typed. Charges for commercial advertisements and loose inserts are available on request.

FOR SALE: NCWCD TECHNICAL REPORTS OF ATLAS SURVEYS

To date, 12 ABBA atlassing surveys have been completed, for each survey a summary report is produced which is followed later by a full report prepared for the NCWCD, providing all the information collected on bird distribution and numbers. In line with the ABBA policy of making all information collected by the project available to those who want to use it, these full reports are copied to relevant libraries, museums and societies. In addition, a very small number are available for sale. Reports of Surveys Nos. 4 to 10, are currently available. (These cover the Asir National park, northern Saudi Arabia, Asir-Hedjaz Mountains, north west Saudi Arabia, South Yemen and Central Arabia.) For details see the sales list accompanying this newsletter.

THE PHOENIX

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ADDRESS

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